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Hair Trigger 1

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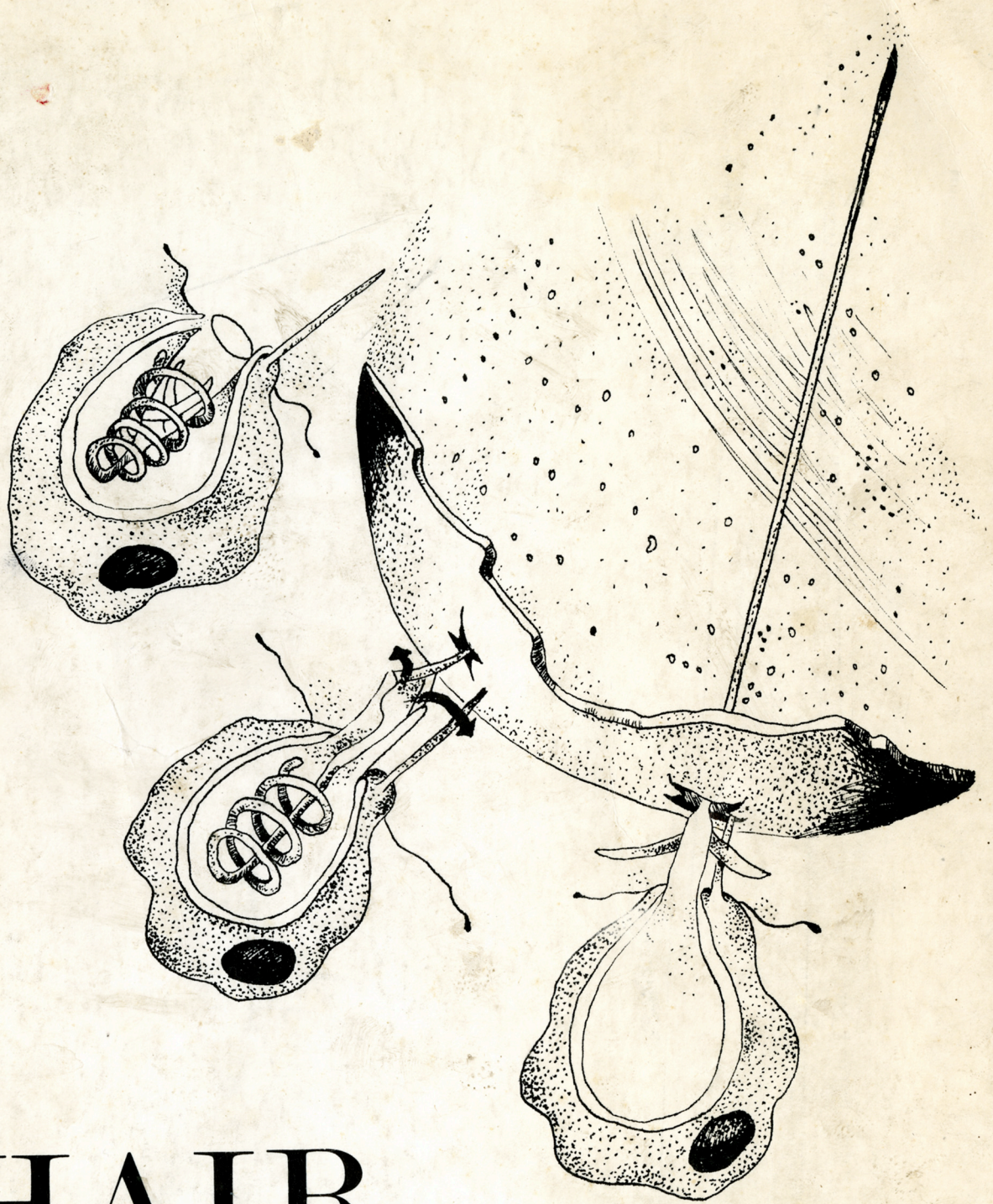


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HAIR TRIGGER

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COVER ILLUSTRATION:

Denise Gaffney

The remarkable cover illustration, so deftly drawn by Denise Gaffney, represents the paramecium *Coli Taurus* in stages up to and including the release of its coiled trigger hair into the hydra wall of a companion organism. Once triggering is completed both cells recuperate, gestate and fall away from each other in the secure knowledge that something most worthwhile had been accomplished after all. -- Editors

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HAIR TRIGGER, published periodically by the Writing Department of Columbia College and edited by advanced writing students, publishes work of currently enrolled Columbia students. The anthologies such as The Story Workshop Reader, Angels In My Oven, It Never Stopped Raining, Don't You Know There's A War On?, and fl present the writing of students over a period of time. Upcoming anthologies will present work by students of the last two years.

Most of the stories selected by the editors come from students currently enrolled in Story Workshop Fiction Writing classes. Pieces also come from the freshman level Story Workshop Writing I and II classes. Many of the pieces originated in either or both the oral Story Workshop exercises and in-class writings. They were then written outside of class, and rewritten after class reading and response, and frequently after conferences with the fiction writing teacher. Students published in HAIR TRIGGER were enrolled in Spring 1977 classes directed by John Schultz, Betty Shiflett, Paul Pekin, Larry Heinemann, Andrew Allegretti, Robert Birk, Eric May and John Mella.

You will find here a lively exploration of strongly defined literary forms and senses of address, with prominent elements of imaginative parody of form, content, manner, and style. Such a lively range is seldom found in any publication.

John Schultz
HAIR TRIGGER Advisor

A special thanks goes out to the patient and persevering secretary of the Writing Department, Edie Heinemann, from the editors and all those involved.

* * *

HAIR TRIGGER may be ordered from Columbia College
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BIG CHUCKIE AND THE DUCK

The Margarine sisters, in their hoop skirts and blue bows, were a fairy tale trio come alive. There was the eldest, Marjory, the middle sister Jane, and the youngest, and by far the prettiest, Mary. They all lived in a brown bungalow near a lake with their brother Big Chuckie, who was unfortunately an idiot in the strictest medical sense of the word.

One clear, crisp autumn day the eldest, Marjory, decided that Big Chuckie had gotten too hairy. "Yes", she exclaimed, "Our dear brother has far too much hair upon him. Why just yesterday it was all caught up in his zipper, and I had the awfulest of awful times getting him unstuck."

So the girls led Big Chuckie into the yard, and pulled his pajamas from his huge body and told him to stand in the washbasin next to the hose. Sister Mary turned on the water and began to wet Big Chuckie down, despite his low moans and startled cries. The water must have been very cold, because the sisters could see wisps of steam rising from Big Chuckie's blue skin.

Sister Marjory began to lather him while the girls sang merrily;

Rub-a-dub
Foam and scrub
shave Big Chuckie
shave away nub

Big Chuckie did not squirm an inch, and finally the girls had him completely lathered, head to toe. Marjory, obviously having the steadiest hand, took the straight razor to Chuckie's shivering chest and began to scrape downward, Chuckie glared at her, and he seemed very afraid until the girls began to sing;

Dirty, dirty hair.

dirty everywhere,

shave Big Chuckie,

shave him till he's bare.

The girls pranced in a circle around the tub, while Marjory made steady progress down Chuckie's belly. When she reached his groin, the girls giggled, and Marjory shut her eyes tightly, embarrassed by the billowing patch of hair and what hung, shriveled and cold as it was, right before her very eyes. Undaunted, now that she was free from looking at his pubis at all, she began to shave him with her eyes still shut. Chuckie moaned, obviously frightened to wit's end, but too petrified to move. Mary and Jane began to sing again, in a giggly, shameful manner;

Shave his dingle,

shave his dangle,

don't slip shaver,

mangle, mangle.

This seemed to upset poor Marjory and she ordered them to stop, but to no avail. Chuckie started to cry but his face was too cold to allow it, so he stood with a wrinkled, pouting expression, his arms around his naked chest, his hands nestled into his hairless armpits.

Having finally finished with the very hairy body of Big Chuckie, the girls rinsed him down with the hose and led him out of the tub. Sister Mary stayed behind to gaze into the bucket. It was filled to the brim with curls and specks of blackish hair.

Near dinner, Mary tied Big Chuckie's bib tightly around his neck. It was Chuckie's most favorite bib, for sewn to the front were eight little blue ducks. Each duck was sewn to a line on a musical staff, and underneath the Music-Note Ducks read; "quuuuack, quack-quack, quack, (rest) quack, qua-ack, quuuuuuuuaaaaaack." The last duck was the largest and therefore a whole-note duck, and had the longest quack. Mary had tried to explain this to Big Chuckie many times, but he merely smiled and began to quack on his own until he was told to shut up.

Chuckie played with his plastic cup while dinner steamed on the stove. The girls had tuned in the "Dr. Plaster Hour" on the radio and listened intently as callers from across the country called in to ask the good doctor for advice and comment. Their eyes widened, and their ears seemed to stand up as a lady caller complained: "Good doctor, I'm Helen Muffed, and I wonder if you could help me with my husband...He lays in bed all day, and falls out for no apparent reason, onto the floor. I am not afraid that he will injure himself, for he is a stout and strong individual, but the apartment below is losing plaster from their ceiling, and gracious, its so hard to serve dinner on the bedroom floor!"

Dr. Plaster replied in a deep, solemn voice: "Mrs. Muffed, in days like we find ourselves right now, the food we eat is of great importance. For instance, we are saturated in fat and oils, pickled in salt and diglicerides. In right nows' get-around-real-quick society we forget how to cook, let alone how to eat, real food. And real food is still out there Mrs. Muffed - if we'd only get off our duffs once in awhile we could find it. If only you would feed your husband more nuts, fresh fruit, and less of everything else, he would become a changed man."

Marjory placed the pot roast on the table and Big Chuckie drooled uncontrollably.

On Sunday the girls dressed up in their best and went to a hill overlooking their lake. They spread a brilliant, blue, checkerboard cloth on the ground, and laid the picnic basket near a tree. The girls were so charming and elegant, and the basket was so splendidly stuffed with scrumptious food, that a passer-by might have mistaken them for a commercial of a picnic, instead of the real thing.

Big Chuckie had gone down to the water's edge and had laid on his stomach. He parted a few of the tall reeds and placed his face into the water. He blew bubbles and tried to scream under water. Gurgles burst around his ears, and when he lifted his wet head from the water he saw, only a foot from his nose, sitting on a twig, an enormous duck. It was even bigger than the Whole-Note Duck. Chuckie giggled and then burst out with a loud, long, lungful of: QUUUUUUUUUUUUUUACK! But this scared the duck away, and it flew up out of the reeds and into the sky.

Chuckie ran up the hill to the girls. They sat, politely passing chicken from one to the other, as the excited Big Chuckie screamed all the way to them; "QUUUUUUAAACK! QUUUUUAAACK!" flapping his big arms in a duckly manner.

"Chuckie stop it!" Marjory screamed. He was interrupting a very good piece of chicken. But, he would not stop. He continued to quack, longer and longer, pointing to the patch of blue above the trees where a brown speck could still be seen flapping away.

At this point Marjory took up the cheese knife and said; "Sisters, our brother has become too much of a duck." They smiled, and tucked the picnic neatly away.

THE MAN WHO WORE DINNER

The man who wore dinner stood proudly at center stage. The softened spotlight gleamed gently on the raw bacon that he wore as lapels. He stepped up to the microphone, his strawberry crepe shoes leaving faint pink footsteps on the beige stage. He thrust his head back, arched his liver pate' eyebrows and burst forth with a deep, vibrating voice. He sang the opening lines to his very own aria, a story of callous entrees, cheap salads, recipes that have left him heartbroken.

Modereto

"Wines of broken vintage
racey sauces,
flambeaus of malcontent
hear me as I whisper hungrily,
come back to me, come back
I am the emptiest Canoli
without your love..."

His lungs heaved with emotion, causing the rib roast of his jacket to swell, oozing its bright red marinade. The spaghetti carefully twined in his hair now resembled the snakes of Methuselah as his head jerked with passion.

Crescendo

"Parmesan!
Escargot!
Casserole!"

...arms blung trembling toward the heavens, his Spanish olive rings glinted radiantly.

"Burrito so coy!
Marmelade my heart!"

...the orchestra and his voice ended with an abrupt, arrogant flash of his black eel cape. The curtain dropped. The audience, briefly stunned by the dramatic conclusion, gradually gained their legs, and broke into a lengthy applause.

Backstage, the man who wore dinner sat before his dressing room mirror. He was in a very excited state and had to restrain himself from tossing his dinner off too hurriedly. Instead he placed the rib roast back into the steam-table dresser with great care, replaced the lid and opened yet another. Each strand of spaghetti was carefully laid lengthwise in its tray. A slight burst of steam briefly fogged the mirror and he had to strain his neck over the blurred section as he removed his flounder ascot, his eyes barely spying the clasps in the dimmed reflection of his mirror.

His manager entered just as he was replacing the last of his buffet; he quickly plucked off the olive rings and tossed them in a relish dish that slid from the front of the dresser; then, in a defiant gesture, produced a small imported sausage from his coat and clipped the end. "O.K. Gustav, you can cool the act now..." The manager pointed to Gustav's sausage, now in his mouth. Gustav lit a match to the end and puffed as the greasy meat caught fire briefly.

"Act?" The faint gray remainders of liver twitched on his brow, "By now I have become my act...I have become, what was it that that writer in last month's issue of 'On the Town' called me?"

The manager frowned and produced the article from his overcoat. "You mean, 'The total surrender of one's culinary id....'" He scanned down the page. "...the epitome of gluttonous abandon...."?"

"Yes...gluttonous abandon." And he sank thoughtfully back in his chair regarding a spot on the ceiling in hypnotic wide-eyed rapture. "...gluttonous abandon," he murmured once more.

His manager coughed, not bothering to cover his mouth, and stuffed the ragged article back in his pocket. "Yeah, well listen maestro, I think we've hit the peak on this freak show."

Gustav snapped from his chair and laughed, "Never!" patting the manager on the back he leaned toward his ear, "You listen, my good man, I'm on top and I intend to stay there!"

"Stay there?" he shrugged, "Nobody stays there...they all come down...right now there is an act opening in Brussels. He pulled politely away from Gustav. "...a new act regarding a man that not only wears breakfast, but does it in ballet! In ballet, mind you, and without breaking one yolk of an egg!"

"Bahhhh!" Gustav spat, "Amateurs!"

"Perhaps, but--"

No BUTS...besides, breakfast is so...so." His face reddened, "It's so damned pedestrian...waffles, pancakes.... Who can take a pancake seriously, I ask you?"

"There has been talk of a whole troupe doing a cafeteria version of 'Swan Lake'..."

Gustav sat pensively back in his chair and began to remove the faint traces of red caviar from his lips. He grunted. "It is all a fad." He finally said. "They will realize the utter fools for what they are. The critics will not stand for it."

"The critics..." and the manager's voice trailed off, his head drooping into his overcoat.

There was a long silence in the room, broken by a knock on the dressing room door. A frail man, thirtyish, in a head usher's uniform stepped halfway into the room, a smile spread over his thin lips, but faded when he sensed the atmosphere in the room.

"Mr. Turgid, sir..."

Gustav's head pivoted in his direction.

"Sir, there is a man here from The Gourmet Monthly to see you sir."

"Send the nit away," he said flatly.

"Gustav," the manager warned, and then smiled weakly to the usher, "Tell him we would be honored to grant him a few minutes..."

As the manager left he passed the reporter in the narrow hall. Without bothering to speak or even nod heads, a brief flicker of recognition leapt between them, and in that hesitant gaze the manager conveyed to the reporter a glimpse of what he could expect from Gustav. The reporter sighed heavily before knocking on the dressing room door.

"So what'll it be, Nappy?" The waitress flicked the end of the plastic menu that the manager seemed so dearly attached to.

"Be?" and Nappy realized he hadn't been giving it much thought.

"Yeah, we serve food here, I think you know what that is."

"Just a cheese burger, Milly."

"No fries?" She looked up from her pad.

"No."

"Man, you look in sad shape today, Nappy. What's a matter? Gustav drop his flounder again? HaHa." She poked his shoulder. He smiled.

"No. He just doesn't realize his career is shot. I mean look at the flea bags we've been playin'." He stared absently at the cleavage of Milly's dress. The first soft, comfortable thing he had seen in a long time.

"At least you're eatin'."

He looked up. "You know he saves every part of the costume now."

She pouted, mocking Nappy in a close, friendly manner. "I'll bet that cape of his is startin' to put on a few airs. HaHa." She poked him again, this time caressing his shoulder.

The diner was empty except for two men farther down the counter. One stirred a cup of coffee thoughtfully, as though at any minute he would break into tears or laughter. The man beside him pushed his hat back to the very crown of his head and slurped loudly away at the soup of the day.

Nappy's eyes lit up, glossed over and he ran his tongue along the tips of his mustache. "You know we used to have our own chef. Yeah." She slid the cheeseburger in

front of him. He picked it up in one hand and took a large bite from it. "Our own chef." Crumbs sputtered from his mouth. "He was from the Waldorf. He could cook the best costumes in town!" He pointed the burger at her accusingly, a drop of ketchup fell to the formica. "...Now all we get are leftovers...."

"We offered our services," Milly said.

"Well, don't think I don't appreciate it, Mil, but you know Gustav..." He bit into the hamburger again. It was slightly raw in the middle. It didn't bother him though. No room to complain. It was free.

"Right now there's a reporter from Gourmet Monthly interviewing him...."

"Maybe it's a break...they could--"

"No. No break. They're gonna do an obituary on him. Put it right on the end of a ten page color piece of that new Ballet Breakfast...." He belched softly. "I'm gonna be lookin' for some new talent real soon. It's either that or a new job."

The Soup Slurper shuffled out the door. The bell tinkled.

Milly shook her head. Blonde pony tail swaying as she moved quietly into the kitchen. Nappy meditated on his hamburger. The bright red center created a mandala of sorts. There were voices mumbling in the kitchen. Milly giggled. Nappy pulled a paper napkin from the dispenser and wiped his lips as he walked to the door. The diner was now completely empty except for the half eaten hamburger that sat bleeding on its plate. A full cup of coffee sat with a bent spoon laid across its top. The bell tinkled brightly as Nappy opened it. Milly returned from the kitchen with a rag. She wiped the counter.

Nappy picked up the evening paper from the corner newstand. "You know, I've been watchin', the newsbay said to him.

Nappy handed him the money. "Watchin'? Watchin' what?"

The boy patted the stack of papers. "I been watchin' how hardly nobody takes the top paper. They always reach under and pull out the second one."

"Is that so?"

"Yeah. You're one of the very rare people in this city that'll take the top paper."

"How about that." Nappy walked across the street to the alley. A bright bulb hung bare over the stage door. The reporter's shiny black convertible was just pulling away.

He climbed the stairs and with one hand on the knob watched the tail lights of the car disappear around the corner. He dreaded the thought of seeing Gustav now. He pushed open the door. It was heavy, old oak. Someone had painted "Stage" in childlike scrawl across the top.

Inside he heard the deep humming that Gustav was accustomed to doing after a good performance. He couldn't

believe his ears.

He walked into the dressing room in a daze.

"Nappy! Hello my good Man!" Gustav beamed cheerfully at him. "Have a seat, Nappy." And he wheeled the chair behind him, pushed him gently into it and continued about his business.

"I take it the interview went--went well?" he stammered.

"Better than well." Nappy noticed that Gustav was cleaning out his steam table, throwing away his costume. He flipped his flounder ascot into the wastebasket with glee, making almost a game out of it.

"Better than well, huh?"

"Yes...a new act for me was suggested...The crowning touch to my career."

Nappy smirked and opened the paper to the want ads. "Crowning touch, huh?"

"Yea. I am to be the new star of The Gourmet Monthly's version of Joan of Arc!"

"Burned at the stake, huh?" he glanced down the column of job listings. Plenty of short order cooks.

"Nappy, you don't understand?" And he pushed the paper down from Nappy's face. His eyes were wide with excitement.

"What's there to understand?" Nappy flicked the paper back up. Meat packers, warehousemen. Night shift.

"Nappy should I have my legs braised or barbequed?"

"I dunno."

Gustav clasped his hands together as though he meant to pray and licked his lips. "You know we must get the best butcher in town. I want only the best pieces taken from me."

"My father was a butcher. There's good money in that. At least he never bitched. Not often." Bus boys wanted, apply after ten.

"I can see me wheeled onto the stage now! Ribs sizzling in the midst of flaming shishkebob!"

"You have to be in the union, though. Butcher's union. Tough to get in. Wish my old man were alive now." He turned the page. Pizza deliverers. Mileage paid. Weekends.

"Nappy! They promised me my own gold steam table. They promised never to scorch me, and when the play is over they'll have all my parts frozen and put on display!"

"Good." Ice Cream drivers needed for summer. Good driving record a must.

Steve Bosak

The two following pieces are excerpted from a longer work in progress about an enigmatic spy named McRoe, who is so far undercover that it is very difficult (and requires ingenious means) to deliver his paycheck or any message to him. (Editors)

WHEN ENGLAND RAINED

The jeep bumped out of the car wash, parting the thick rubber curtain at the exit neatly across his clear windshield. Before McRoe could put his front wheels across the curb, he saw a dark brown blur fall from the sky and splat directly in front of him. A man had fallen, obviously from some great height into the street. The victim's bowler, dislodged by the impact, spun on its brim on the pavement, then lost momentum and wobbled to rest near the fallen man's ear.

A black walking cane lay broken in two at his side. McRoe approached him, and gazed up at the towering buildings around him, trying to ascertain through which window the man had exited. His eyes focused instead on the hundreds of brown-suited men that were falling from the sky.

A few blocks away, one bounced off the top of a bus and came to rest on the sidewalk. All along the street people were taking cover, pointing into the sky, shouting in fear and confusion.

The men fell spread-eagled to the pavement, canes hooked to their arms, bowlers atop their heads. Traffic stopped as the bodies plummeted on car hoods, across store awnings, and into the clots of frightened pedestrians.

They emerged from the low, gray clouds as tiny enlarging X's, streaming towards the city like a brown mist.

One tumbled, cartwheel fashion, along the side of an apartment building across from McRoe. It bounced briefly when reaching the pavement, and let out a sharp, high, squeak.

McRoe grabbed the man at his feet and pulled him into the safety of the car wash. Outside, the splattering of men became intense, thuds and squeaks filling the air in a fierce staccato rhythm.

He turned the man over. He was not a man. The face

was stitched into the fabric of the head. The lips, the eyes, nose, all carefully needlepointed onto the flesh-colored fabric. The face was startled, fearful, as any human face would have appeared after such a fall. The suit it wore was well tailored, vested, good material. He searched the shirt, bowler, jacket. No identification, no labels. Unidentified mannequin on his hands. The streets were filling up with them.

He examined the dummy closely. It appeared to have a certain Continental flavor to the style of dress. Handlebar mustache sewn over the lips with exquisite precision. The seamstress of these life-size dolls was a fucking artist indeed!

McRoe scratched his nose, was half-tempted to pick the thing up and haul it back to the street. He gripped it by the waist. It squeaked again, not at all unlike a rubber duck. He heard a faint click and the eyes of the mannequin began to glow softly as a stream of crisp, metallic words flowed from some hidden speaker in the chest. In a thick, prim English accent the dummy blurted:

"Good show my good man! Spot of ale after the job? Very good. Darby, have you bet the Darby this year? Yes, yes, wish I hadn't. One hundred hard earned pounds lost on that sorry turf. Quite right.

"Easy as mutton may well be guvna, I dare say my misses won't ever be inclined to serve me a taste at all."

McRoe squeezed the waist once again and the patter ceased, the eyes dimmed. English puppets. An English plot, he thought. Or somebody was framing the British. He parted the rubber strips and saw that the downpour of British dummies had let up. A few scattered stragglers fell to the streets, now covered three or four deep in bowlers and three-piece-suited, respectable looking, British-type citizens.

He gripped the doll under the arms, hauled it into his jeep, propped it up in the seat with the remains of its walking stick, and hastily threw its bowler back in place. As he pulled out into the street, he ran over quite a few dummies. They squeaked and each went into its own English chatter:

"Quite nice day, more tea please if you..."

"Bloody infantry, that's wha'did us in for the..."

"Devalued, not again, God save the..."

"Russkies, Russkies and Yanks now days are whats..."

"Not a farthing for the likes of her knickers..."

The street was a blubbing cacaphony of Cockney, Welsh, Liverpudlian, Cornish, and yes, even a few brogues and Highlanders could be heard.

McRoe's jeep surmounted the difficult terrain with ease, rising and falling through the tangle of puppets as people clustered against buildings, only then realizing that the shapes that filled the street could not possibly be human.

The children were the first to venture into the drifts of tangled limbs, tossing bowlers back and forth, twirling

canes and picking up the limp dolls by the head, while others beat them with the walking sticks.

McRoe ran over the last bowler, and the street ahead was clear, the dummy spoke up.

"Really appreciate the ride ol' chap. I just detest crowds."

McRoe hadn't touched the damn thing; it was jabbering away on its own. He pulled over to the curb to let a squad car pass. "You appreciate the ride, huh?"

"Indeed I do, I'd be quite late if you hadn't come along."

McRoe passed his hands over the dummies eyes, the light flickered. He took his gun out of its holster and pulled back the trigger.

"Don't shoot! I beg of you! I've got a family to think of, I really mean you no harm. Good God, man!"

McRoe lowered the gun. The stiched expression of fright had not moved during the whole incident.

"Lift my bowler, please if you will."

He picked up the bowler and waited.

"Now if you'd be so good as to search around in the perspiration band you will find an address."

McRoe plucked out the card hidden in the band.

Darby Fashions

Hotel Wergeld

Suite Seventeen

"If you would be kind enough..." It pleaded, seemingly on the verge of complete collapse. "It's been such a very long trip you know..." McRoe turned down an alley and headed uptown.

The jeep was devoid of any other conversation until they neared the hotel. He clicked on once again.

"You may pull around back to the service elevator if you will, less of a fuss there."

Next to the waste bins a cat looked up from its dinner of trash. Metal doors slid open. Clean aluminum interior of an elevator.

McRoe hoisted the dummy up onto his shoulders then sat him against a wall of the elevator.

"Do come up with me," it invited in a friendly manner.

"No. Thanks anyway, perhaps another time." He stepped from the elevator.

"Aren't you in the least bit curious about what has happened, what I am for instance?"

McRoe wiped his nose on his coat sleeve. "Naw, I figure you are what you are, and its probably none of my business."

The dummy cackled, amused, its eyes flashing on and off with the harsh laughs. "There, my good man, you are most seriously mistaken." The doors slid shut, and sticking out from the rubber molding was a familiar green envelope. He snatched it up, tore open the top. It was his paycheck.

WATER

McRoe, tongue swollen and dry, staggers to the faucet, thrusts a crusty tumbler under the spigot and spins the knob titled COLD. There is but a tiny dribble making its way into the glass. He opens the faucet all the way. Drip. Drip. He cocks a bloodshot eye up into the spigot's mouth and spies an obstruction. Working his fingers into the tight opening he pulls it free. A long, wrinkled envelope. Meanwhile, water has begun to splash furiously into the sink, but McRoe in his infinite surrender to idle curiosity, unfolds the envelope and tears it open. Pale blue stationary falls into the whirlpool of the sink. He fishes the pages out and reads;

Dear McRoe,

Imagine, only three weeks at sea and already I miss you so much I sit awake at night wondering what in the hell you could be up to, and what kind of swamp you've been trudging in of late, without my mothering soul to guide you. Huh, what kind?

But really darling, these cruises are such a dreadful poke in the sphincter. They've put a temporary ban on shuffleboard since some ruffians rebounded a Dachsund off the port bow, and I suspect the bartenders are watering down the cognac. (I can belt down three or four inside of a half hour and still recite sections of Dante's "Cantos" with no slurs to speak of) but perhaps its just the salt air. Sometimes I just hold my breathe until the whitecaps off the sundeck look like butterflies.

But please honey, don't let me paint such a dreary picture, I realize this wasn't supposed to be all fun and games. I fully understand what my real duty aboard ship is, and a steward and myself have been making daily inquiries into the activities of Mr. Jergens. And this is where I must give you the good, and alas, yes, the bad news. Promise not

to be angry until I've told you all.

Well, it was at least a week before we found out Jergens was dead. Mrs. Abercrombie, (frumpy old nag, husband owns Texas), had gone out to the quarter deck with a very thick Gothic novel. (In any case it had a horse and a lady on the cover.) It was a brisk day and she pulled up a lounge next to Jergens, opened to a highly romantic part (perhaps where Count Fasias presses Loretta's lips to his) when a prevailing westerly wind swept across deck over Jergens and hit Mrs. Abercrombie full in the face. As she told us between fainting spells, there was the smell of fresh, salty, sea air to be sure, but predominating that, there was the sweet, musty odor of something long dead. She turned to Jergens indignantly, thinking at first that he'd shit his drawers or become carelessly flatulent.

She spoke. Jergens did not respond. His old, flacid face pointed directly out to sea; his Italian wraparound shades standing sentinel to his eyes and his true feelings. And believe me, deary, Jergens was feeling very dead.

Anyway, Mrs. Abercrombie merely moved to starboard and on her way around remarked haughtily to one of our stewards (the tall, friendly one I spoke of) about the smelly old man on port bow. The steward (name's Skua, very Nordic hair) went immediately to Jergens, and realizing this was our opportunity, fetched me from the claws of a boring bridge game.

Well, I thought this was our chance. We emptied out his pockets. (Wallet, foreign brass coins, laundry stubs, etc.) found his room key, and, making as though he were drunk or seasick, we both hoisted an arm and dragged him to the railing. (The things I go through for you McRoe, have you ever lugged around a week-old corpse as though it were your best friend? Have you ever carried a corpse for me? Huh? I didn't think so.) So we got him to the railing when all of a sudden I hear a hiss, and Jergens mouth started to foam a bit (Skua tells me this was merely gas escaping from the bloated stomach, dislodged by our moving him. This Skua has a lot on the ball.)

I screamed and Skua dumped him overboard. We couldn't have planned it better. It looked just like an accident, what with me screaming and what not, and Mrs. Abercrombie believes it was a suicide, due to the fact that she must have embarrassed the poor man.

He sank pretty fast. Skua cursed himself out though; he forgot to snatch the glasses, (he's always wanted a pair, and I do agree they'd go quite well with his deep tan. Perhaps I'll pick up a pair for him when we reach Iceland.) Well, that's the good news honey. Now the bad.

Skua and I went to Jergens room in search of the chest. (Or was it a chest filled with comic books. No. Just a comic book right?) Well at any rate, we began to search the room for whatever it was you asked me to search for. Skua had had three weeks training as a Special Detective so he laid out

the plan for tearing apart the room. First we looked in all the unobvious places: Under the phone. Behind the toilet bowl. Under the ice bucket (it still had ice cubes in it, after all those days, can you imagine!) In the ice bucket.

We took up the carpet, slit the seams of his coats, poured out his tobacco decanter, leafed through Gideon's Bible, rifled through his entire wardrobe, when what do you think I found? The most divine set of black, frilly nylons, heaven only knows what that old coot had been keeping them around for.

Well, I scampered out of my Bermudas to try them on and was bending over to take off my panties, when what do you know, Skua has my little cunt in his hand from behind. I don't know if the ship pitched or my knees went out, but I found myself gripping the nightstand with his incredibly rough sea knuckles spreading my hot cheeks apart. Before I could even swear my allegiance to you, McRoe, he had me dripping wet and expecting the firm thrust of his member. So what happens. The little shit shoves a cold ice cube up my tunnel of love and lays down on the carpet, catching the drops as they melted in my vagina and dripped out onto his tongue.

The most comical thing I'd ever seen, can you imagine this jerk? He calls it Zen sex. I call it out-on-the-rough-sea too long. Anyway love, as you know by now, we couldn't find whatever it was you sent me to look for. Maybe something will turn up later on. Wish you were here dear,

Love and Intimate Kisses,

Kishy

A CHARACTER-AUTHOR ASSASSINATION

Robert Belchley, character in progress in a play in progress called Belchley Business, had become very upset over the way the author, Tony Alexander, was developing his character. Finally, after two drafts and a projected third which promised no better for him, Belchley determined to kill Alexander.

"Listen," said Belchley in his sonorous voice, "at first I was happy to be the protagonist in a play, especially a farce. I've always enjoyed farces. But I soon saw that the author wasn't going to present me in a sympathetic light at all. Not only did he show me bribing politicians, shafting a small businessman named Craytin, having him thrown out of a window and then taking over his business with my conglomerate, but he took the good things I did and twisted them around so they seemed--pathetic!"

Belchley was getting upset. He took a cigar out of his suit pocket, lit it and took a few deep puffs. It seemed to calm him down. "I admit I did all those things," he continued, tossing away his cigar over his shoulder, "and I'll admit I take pride and pleasure in doing them well. I'm not apologizing. After all, he was the one who made me do them, he made me the way I am in the first place. Besides, if you were in my position you would have done those things too, and so would he, no matter what he tells you. But--well, for example, he didn't give me one soliloquy! And every day I have my staff find a bum somewhere and bring him to me. I give that bum food and a thousand dollars in cash. Every day! But Alexander ridicules it. He makes it appear that I'm doing the whole thing out of guilt feelings, to appease my conscience, and that's a lie. He makes me look like a pathetic, despicable wretch, and I won't stand still for it any longer! I'm gonna get that bastard!"

At 7:35 A.M. on a Wednesday, Tony Alexander entered Faber's Pancake House at Union Station in Chicago. Sitting at the counter as was his habit on Wednesday, he ordered a waffle and coffee as was his habit on Wednesday, opened his copy of Frankenstein to where he'd left off and began reading. He was a bit restless for some reason and his attention wandered from the book. Every seat at the counter was taken, as was every seat at the other three counters and most of the tables. Waitresses and busboys hurried this way and that while sounds of dishes, silverware and conversation hummed in the background.

Alexander was thinking disinterestedly about a story he was working on. It dealt with a dentist who purposely pulled the wrong teeth out of his patients' mouths and it wasn't going well. He suddenly had a strong feeling that he was being watched, studied in fact. He looked sharply at the people at the counter, then around at the people at the tables. Nothing. He shrugged and took a gulp of hot coffee.

The waitress was coming with two armfuls of orders, including his waffle perched on a dish on her left forearm. She tripped on something but managed to keep her balance and save most of the orders, except his waffle (damn), which fell to the floor and EXPLODED? wha?, sending food, eating implements, dishes, people flying through the air. People screamed. Alexander picked himself up off the floor in a panic. Maple syrup was all over everything and everyone. People were getting to their feet, shouting chaotically. The counter had a large, black hole blown through it and one of the chairs was blown off its base, but as far as he could see, no one was seriously hurt. He remembered with a rush of fear in his stomach that that was his waffle. He'd felt he was being watched. He looked around. Amid the chaos, he saw a man in an expensive suit walking quickly away out of the restaurant. "Hey!" he yelled.

The man turned around and glared at him. He was a paunchy, balding man in his 50's. Alexander's blood ran cold as he realized that he knew him unmistakably--Belchley! A character from his play!

Belchley grinned frighteningly at him, enjoying his terror and disbelief, then turned and walked away. But--how? How could that be? Alexander felt he had to look in his Belchley Business notebook, searched frantically, found it nearby on the floor. He flipped through to the end of his notes for the next draft, saw at the bottom of the page, in red ink: "Alexander. I'm leaving. You're distorting my story, but you're not going to humiliate me on stages all over the world. I'll kill you first. Belchley."

The police were arriving. "Stop that man!" Alexander cried.

"What man?" said a cop. Belchley had already gone.

After getting over his initial shock of fear, Alexander was at a loss on what to do. He had no doubt that it was true, that a fictional character he had created had escaped, as it were, and was trying to kill him, but he had no illusions about

the police or anyone else believing him. He was afraid, because Belchley, who had, after all, existed within his mind, obviously knew everything about him, and thus, would know the best moments to take him by surprise and kill him, as with the exploding waffle. He, on the other hand, obviously did not by any means know everything about Belchley. He had lost control of his own fictional character. Whatever "his own" meant.

Alexander wondered why Belchley would go to such extreme lengths when the play was not likely to be published or performed anywhere, if it was even finished. It was the product, as Belchley well knew, of a young unpublished nobody who hoped to continue as a writer, but who as yet was simply a college writing student trying to learn his craft, although he had already been called "a writer of rare perception" by his mother.

The thought that he had created a character so vivid that he literally came to life scarcely comforted Alexander, especially since he knew it wasn't true. Belchley wasn't nearly finished or "ready" yet. Even so, he realized he must have essentially captured Belchley's evils and agonies so unerringly, even in the early drafts, that it was unbearable, forcing the character to attempt the destruction of his creator/tormentor, and this pleased him at the same time that it frightened him. Alexander suddenly realized that what had seemed, from his point of view, to be pity and even compassion for his wretched protagonist, must have seemed to Belchley, high-handed, insufferable condescension.

He realized suddenly why none of the other characters in the play would have placed a bomb in his waffle. They were neither indicted nor pitied as thoroughly. Even Craytin, the small businessman whose stupidity and greed makes him susceptible to Belchley's shady deals, and who thus is given responsibility not only for his own arrest but, by extension, for the entire reign of corporate heads like Belchley (the old Every One Of Us Is Guilty routine: YOU--pointing to the audience--are responsible, you have consented to this, a good tool), does strengthen and try to take Belchley to the District Attorney at play's end. He dies in the attempt, going out the window of Belchley's office, and the action does give him, despite all his faults, a tiny bit of the Tragic Hero, which would compensate for his having to endure ridicule and responsibility until then.

As for the others, Fox, the bum, was an amiable minor character, Miss Spinner merely Belchley's secretary, an underling, a long-time dependent. Unlike Craytin, she really can't do anything about her situation any longer, if she even wants to, and so she gets the fun of throwing Craytin out the window without the liability of the audience's anger, if any, which goes to Belchley. Besides, they all lacked not only Belchley's motivation, which obviously was very powerful, but also the imagination Alexander had so generously bestowed upon him.

Suddenly Alexander realized that he might enlist these

three, or any of the characters from his stories, to help him against Belchley. After all, wouldn't they cease to exist if he, their author, were killed? Or would they? Belchley obviously wouldn't. A thousand qualifications swarmed into his mind. It was too risky. He couldn't trust any of his characters, even the ones he thought he knew best, until he'd dealt with Belchley. Besides, he reflected in disgust, many of the protagonists in his stories were based on himself and so wouldn't even be able to help themselves, let alone him.

Alexander suddenly realized something else--that he, Alexander, may still have had control over Belchley, and that he had subconsciously wished his character to come to life and attempt to kill him out of his own guilt feelings. He shuddered. But--this way also held out hope. If it was true that he still controlled Belchley, couldn't he stop him by--yes!--writing a story in which Belchley kills Alexander? This story would, if he had control of Belchley, relieve his own guilt feelings and thus end his subconscious wish for his character to do him in. If Belchley was actually on his own, the story would at least placate him by placing him in a context not only pleasurable but, in his (Belchley's) mind at least blameless, sympathetic. He would gladly return to endure Belchley Business (which this affair had made Alexander, he suddenly realized, determined to finish) if he knew he would also be able to enjoy such a story as this--perhaps with a title such as "A Character-Author Assassination." Alexander immediately began work on the story, not wanting to stop until he had finished and Belchley had returned to the world of fiction.

He had trouble beginning the story in his anxiety, but finally started it off. Driven by fear that Belchley would cut him off before he had finished, he raced ahead with the plot, unconcerned with structure or subtlety. Although his main concern was to finish the piece and save his own skin, he wasn't used to his undisciplined, full-speed-ahead approach. It bothered him in spite of himself, and he fully expected the finished product to be a piece of shit. After all, everyone was by now thoroughly sick of stories along the fiction/reality/illusion axis, which had become so prevalent that every desperate blockhead who dared to write, as the phrase went (how Alexander feared that he was just one more of these!), was composing literary dung in which the author, the characters, the reader and anyone else who happened along were thrown into a large mixing bowl, sliced up unrecognizably, and blended, with pretentious authorial silly putty, into a meaningless, fashionable mess. The genre's intellectual point was made, had been made by every twit able to lift pen to paper; enough was enough. He had no choice, however, but to write the story, clichéd though it was, for the sake of his own physical survival.

Or did he? Was this reality, or was he--

Not wanting to enter into any more troubling, confusing and above all, stupid layers of fiction/reality/illusion speculation, he put aside his troubled, confused and stupid

thoughts to console himself with the possibility that the very fact that he was writing the story to physically survive (wasn't he?), was in fact WRITING FOR HIS LIFE, might give the work a depth of urgency and passion which would elevate it above its glutted, exhausted genre and get him an O. Henry Memorial Award.

What really bothered him, he suddenly realized, was his presence there at his desk, writing a story about a fictional character who kills its author, to save himself from one of his fictional characters who was trying to kill him. His life had become a New Fiction cliché, which was even worse than having your life become an Old Fiction cliché because, after all, the Old Fiction has the proven staying power. If one's life had to be a cliché, better to be a cliché which had been immortalized by Shakespeare or Tolstoy or anyone back there and which would have meaning for future generations, than one which may have little or no interest for those generations and be set down by someone who would turn out to be merely a footnote in literary history. Alexander wasn't disparaging authors who became footnotes in literary history; he would have been delighted beyond all bounds to see himself attain the status of a footnote in literary history, to accomplish that much. But for his life to become simply a second-rate literary cliché, a documented case of a footnote in literary history, was just too much. His life?

He tried not to think about it; it was giving him a headache. He suddenly realized it was giving him a headache. It was midnight. He had been working for sixteen straight hours, but now he was almost done. Was almost done. He was down to the last paragraph. The stupid plot called for Belchley to surprise Alexander at his desk while he was working on a story about Belchley surprising Alexander at his desk. He suddenly realized he wasn't sure he had headache/fiction/reality/illusion/reality/illusion/fiction/illusion/illusion/character/Old/New/realized/New Fiction/author/Old Shakespeare/illusion/Old Illusion/realized/suddenly/footnote/character/Old Fiction New/headache as he wrote he had the unmistakable sense of being an egotistical jerkoff/reality/but he suddenly realized/headache/suddenly realized he had to go on. Effortfully he continued writing; only a few sentences to go and he'd be safe. He suddenly realized only a few sentences to go and he'd be safe. Just as he reached the last sentence, however, in which Belchley surprises Alexander at his desk, Belchley sprang into the room with a wild cry (it hadn't occurred to Alexander until that moment that if he finished such a story, he might actually--NO!) and strangled him with some piano wire, and the story came to an end abruptl

THE CELESTIAL THEATRE

At the celestial theatre, the worms of the universe gathered to outline what we would have to go through when it was to be our turn. We were told to peer through our eye glasses, and so we did.

It was a huge glittering paladium, with fresh fruit bars on all sides. Grapefruits and oranges, plums and pears, lemons and limes, pineapples and cherries, bananas and berries, ...apples, apricots, peaches....they were all there and more. Lining the bars and walls, all the way to the darkened skies, where they could be plucked away by any passer by; and the bartenders poured whiskies and wines from large brass flasks, and the women seated on the penis shaped white marble bar stools all drank like fish.

There was a great stage with a long hundred foot runway that jutted out from its center. The heavy purple velvet curtain was closed just then, but the flickering footlights that outlined the runway and stage kept you waiting with sweaty anticipation. Gay men in white tuxedos and slicked back hair, lined the runway. One sat picking his nose and pulling out colorful butterflies. Some drank, while others smoked, and others kissed and fondled crotches.

The audience was mixed. There were the nudes, the semi-nudes, and the well dressed. Some sat with their legs crossed, some strummed guitars, some ate fruit, and some were even masturbating. Little pasty faced boys, in red tights, went scurrying around with wet hot towels in expectation of a scummy ejaculation.

It was a packed house. Women filled the bars, men lined the runway and stage, and others stood or sat at round tables in the audience. To the left of the runway near the stage was a small combo of musicians playing the dirtiest jazz anywhere. The drummer was a snake, the pianist a raccoon, the bassist an

owl, and the baritone sax player was definitely a walrus. Bright white lights came from the skies like milk being poured from a giant pitcher, and they swept over the heads of all the glittery people. Colors dazzled the eye, and the hungry males slobbered in puddles on the floor.

The curtain opened and the audience looked at its face in the gigantic mirror on the stage. A loud cheer drowned out the band and they all stood, all except the men in the white tuxedos. They sat curiously still. Then there came a businessman running through the crowd looking for a seat. He was dressed in a black tuxedo without the tails. There was but one seat in the entire theatre, and that was the one at the end of the long runway. He ran over to it and sat down, panting heavily. Once in that highbacked leather chair, he began to sweat furiously. He removed his coat, undid his tie, and rolled up his sleeves. His black curly hair was soaked with perspiration, and as a result his head reflected the light like a mirror. His black rimmed glasses fogged, which prompted him to take them off and wipe them on his sleeve. The show was about to begin.

The lights dimmed. The crowd fell silent. There was a drum roll, and a single spotlight hit the center of the stage. The floor of the stage opened as if to swallow the audience, but instead a great pool of water appeared. Swinging in the air above the pool were nude men and women. Colored lights bombarded them as they urinated into the pool; and the audience cheered until they were through. Out of the center of the pool, a great fountain sprang forth. It was made of gold and was decorated with nude statues in which water sprayed out of every orifice imaginable. Nude nymphs splashed in the waters, and played with each other to the delight of the audience.

Stage right: a tall willowy woman, well over six feet tall, ostrich plumes sprouting from her G-string, covering her torso and part of her two huge breasts. Another bunch of plumes stuck out of a gold band around her head. She was redhaired and beautiful. She wore ruby red stiletto heels on her feet, and walked hands on hips, slowly down the runway. Following her was an endless line of women of the same mold.

The procession stopped when she came to the end of the runway. All of the other girls ripped off their plumes and flung them into the audience. They stood naked, legs spread apart and hands on their hips, daring someone to touch them. The audience screamed with pleasure. Men and women disrobed. The men in the white tuxedos took out their handkerchiefs and wiped their faces in unison. Masterbation became uncontrollable.

The redhaired woman looked down at the man in the black tuxedo. The theatre fell silent. The man was ushered onto the stage by the boys in the red tights. She stripped him down to his shorts, and looked him over. Next, she took his glasses off, threw them to the floor and smashed them with her long

heel. She discarded her plumes and revealed her voluptuous body. The crowd roared. She then grabbed the man and flipped him to the ground and got on top of him; another roar! The man lay there like submissive jello. She slid her wet redhaired groin over his sweaty face, and she pumped and pumped until she screamed and the audience screamed with her.

The man had turned a horrible shade of blue, and had passed on to the cosmic horror that awaited him. She stripped off his shorts and held them high above her head in victory. Men in white tights came in with a stretcher and surgical tools. They removed the man's testicles and put them in a jar filled with a clear liquid. The man was put on the stretcher and removed. The redhaired woman walked with shorts and jar in hand, back down the runway. The crowd cheered, and she disappeared. Everyone was invited to come up and play in the fountain. Most did, but others chose to get drunk, masterbate, or fuck on the floor.

Backstage: A thick hard hand pounds on the door marked with a glittering red star. The door is opened, and in walks a mean looking stump of man. He is wearing a cabana outfit, shorts and all. He carries a ping pong paddle in his right hand. The redhaired woman sits in a big chair, just below an orange neon sign that flashes the number 733. Her legs are draped over each arm of the chair, exposing her fleshy vulva. A woman sitting on the floor next to her is ramming a dildo in and out of the redhaired woman's vagina. Another woman is laying next to the dildo lady, her face buried in that woman's groin.

The little man turns beet red, and kicks a nearby table over, and then screams at the redhaired woman: "God dam-it, how many times do I have to tell you!!!!..... One testicle! That's all you are allowed!!!"

With that, he throws the two other women across the room, and into a wall. They lay there sucking on each others breasts, and licking the blood from their temples. Then he throws the redhaired woman against the other wall. She stands hands stretched towards the ceiling, against the wall. Her ass is red and bruised, yet orgasmic juices run down her legs and form small pools on the floor. She drops to the ground to recover. The man leaves with his paddle, mumbling about an ice cold beer as he goes.

The blue man, formerly of the black tuxedo, was buried in an unmarked grave. But no one will forget his name.

We took our glasses off, and the slimy serpents told us that soon it would be our turn, and that we would have our own unmarked graves.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Out beyond the screened porch with its green-blanketed row of bunk beds was a low stone wall up which we climbed to hide in the wild-flowers when we were supposed to play volleyball. Our teams didn't want us; we were shy players with weak wrists. We didn't go very far into the brush because we were afraid of getting lost. I took a photograph of a yellow weed-flower there once, but my hand quivered and it came out blurred.

Gene told me about her blue chiffon graduation dress which her parents would hopefully mail to the camp before the week's end. We were both wallflowers at the evening dances though.

Just once every evening Peter came and made the proper bow to me, we danced one dance, and he said thank-you as I was already fleeing back to my seat. How could he have spoken to me then? My skirts were always too long or too rosy, plainly my mother still guarded me.

My parents were refugees from Latvia. It was a Soviet satellite country; they couldn't go back and they, as well as every other Latvian, were afraid the whole culture would be swallowed up and the language would die. So I was sent to the Latvian camp to be instilled with a Latvian spirit and loyalty.

I have a photograph of the group of girls in front of the porch, all in a row; my shorts were the baggiest. I have a photograph of Gene with a dog we would pet sometimes, cut in back of the porch when we were not participating in some group activity; her head is down and she looks subdued. I have a photograph of all of us standing in order on the white line around the volleyball field for attendance. Peter is leaning forward, clapping his hands--the boys next to him edging away from him, looking at him with distrust.

The second year I went to camp, my little sister Ingrid came too. I had told her all year what fun it was; how I spun

over the dance floor and stayed up half the night giggling with the others, and how nice and warm the lake was.

That fantasy was shattered probably half an hour after we arrived, though she never did say anything to me about my misrepresentations. I think she was as bewildered as I was children were supposed to have a good time at camp, weren't they? We were afraid there was something wrong with us.

Gene had come up again, but she came with a girl who lived near her, and I could not get very close to the two of them. This time we had brought our very best dresses for the evening dances. The popular older girls didn't bother with dressing up, they just wore skirts and blouses.

One had slightly high-heeled shoes run down so much at the right sides of the heels from her bow-legged walking that no one else could wear them, much as they tried to imitate her walk, because the shoes were so cute and she was so popular.

We were afraid of the older girls; in some way I can't remember they bullied us. Or maybe it was the terrible realization that they could do so, if they deigned to notice us. They loved to exchange clothes. The first day one cried, "I've come up with all plaid or patterned shorts and tops and none of them match!" Laughter. One came into our section once and went through the closet, considering each dress. She came to Gene's fancy dress and said "That's not bad." Gene said sharply "It's mine." The girl said "Well, I wouldn't be caught dead in it, don't worry, I won't take it." and left. Gene was looking defensive and hurt.

There was a volleyball tournament that year and everyone had to play. Gene and I were on the same team. It was quite open about its feelings. "Oh, God, do we have to have them?"

Our team was supposed to play another right before the end of the swim period. Gene and I swam behind the end of the pier and bobbed up and down there, trying to hide. The sports director located us, and leaned over the side, telling us our teams needed us. "No, they really don't need us at all," we protested hopefully. But it was no use. We had to come out and play, wearing our wet swimming suits.

Peter was on the other side. He was very eager to play and the others were trying to be blasé.

Everywhere I stood for the first half-hour I left a wet place on the packed soil because I had just come out of the water. When we rotated the next person would look at it as if it were disgusting, and not stand in it for the first few minutes until their absorption in the game took over. I was very embarrassed.

I remember dressing with Gene one evening; no one was in the porch for some reason. She wore a short yellow dress and was worried about whether it was decent. She kept tugging it down. She was very pretty in it. I pinned my hair up in two braids and used some of her hair spray. I was so afraid

it would come down that I must have used eighty bobby pins. The air was dusty yellow. We lined up for roll call again; acting differently than in the mornings. Shyer. The older girls nudged each other and scuffled. The boys stood half turned away. Most of them wouldn't dance.

Peter still danced with me once a night, and he was still the only one to dance with me.

I didn't see Ingrid much there, she had to look out for herself. She sat at the table next to mine in the dining hall. She didn't like the food.

I have a photograph of myself in some volleyball game there, dressed in shorts and a sweater. I look squeezed into myself, taut, arms close by my sides.

I have a photograph of my sister Ingrid sitting on her bed with its iron head, wearing a dark green and black striped T-shirt. She looks bony and strained.

Now you are thinking, but wasn't there anything good about it? And I try very hard to remember, but the best I can do is to say I could always see the potential for happiness, like the hazy evening before the dance as we walked to the dusty volleyball court in our white shoes. It was just the wrong time and the wrong people.

We did not go back again. It seems someone said something to my mother about our not quite fitting in, and she was indignant and disappointed in us, as though we were defective belongings of hers.

I saw Peter a few times across the distance of a concert hall or theatre through the years. He never lost his vitality. Once at a folk fair I saw him roaming along the side with a couple of others, looking restless.

I heard about him. I heard he was brilliant, had graduated from high school early, and was already in college.

I did not see Gene again.

My mother knew Peter's mother, just slightly. We could have met again at other dances, at other gatherings of these emigres tightly guarding their language, their offspring who obediently wore the folk costume and did the folk dance and swore in the balconies when they were finally alone and unwatched. And I did mean to go again, to see if I could take up the language and see if there was a nucleus of truly creative people anywhere there. But I kept putting it off; things kept coming up.

I heard of Peter. He went to these gatherings. He went to the young peoples' parties in the basement of the league building, where they drank and danced to rock music as in the separate ball upstairs the older people circled in ornate waltzes and foxtrots.

I hadn't danced since that camp. I didn't know how.

At the New Year's Eve party Ingrid took off her shoes and danced down the street in her nylons. I was no longer living at home; she told me about the difficulty of explaining her muddled and torn gown to our mother in the morning. "Ingrid--you mean--there was mud on the dance floor?"

Ingrid said all that the Latvian youth did was drink. At that party a young girl who had gone up to the roof with her drink fell off and fractured her skull.

Peter was leaning against the bar, leaning sharply backward and staring into space, when Ingrid asked if he remembered me, if he remembered the ten-year-old girl he danced with, one dance a night. He straightened. "Yeah ... she was real pretty," he said. "God, that was a long time ago ..."

I am going to move in with Daniel now, it's settled, it's been long enough. I wonder whether to paint his wall apricot, a color I could sink into, as deeply as I sink into life with him. Together just weekends till now, we have started cleaning up his house. There is a huge coffee mill we took apart and had sandblasted; on top of the cast-iron fireplace it makes the room look very aged. White weeds from the field, old brown-glass medicine bottles, huge. He built the house with a southern exposure, windows along that side, the house is like a pavilion open to the fields.

The smell of wood. Flames. My mother is dry. My mother will come to visit us, when I live here. We will have to start asking her months before we really want her to come, because she will not accept at first.

The door to the room that will be a guest room is fixed with a rope holding it open just the right distance, a pillow wedged at the top, so the kitten can get inside to eat, and the dogs can't. I will have to paint it too. Marks of hands. A house to be lived in. Red water, rust. My mother will be helpless. Fresh stiff flowers dear.

When Daniel drives up at midday I go out across the gravel drive to meet him (and I have my arms wrapped around myself because I am afraid of grasshoppers). My mother is frightened of everything. Even the morning light will startle her. Giving her all to warming the cold sheets; another confrontation. She'll miss the ball in ping-pong, she won't be able to sing.

Daniel taught me to dance again. We practiced our waltz steps in the living room and got ready to go to the Latvian ball. Happily. My mother would have disapproved. Daniel is thirty years older than me.

I guess I looked sixteen, and for the first time as we walked to the ballroom Daniel looked as if he felt bad about it. "No one likes to see a young girl ... well, never mind, forget it."

"It's all right Cookie-face."

He wore a white suit and sandals. I wore a long transparent apricot dress with a creamy macrame belt and sandals. I had made my dress for about two dollars. I wanted his opinion on the Latvian group. We looked at our reflection in the windows and were pleased with our individualistic appearance.

There were over three thousand people at the ball, and it was the law that with so many, there could not be a bar operating. So we rode escalators up to bars on the upper levels

of the hotel for drinks. It was a fancy hotel, plushy red carpeting and a waterfall on the main floor.

Daniel told me afterwards that as he rode up the gleaming escalator at one point in the evening, he saw a lovely blonde girl's face at the top. As he got nearer, it turned out to be a boy's face; the lips opened and a long-drawn exclamation, "Shiiit," came out.

The dance floor was crowded. I didn't see Peter. Daniel would count the beat for me at the start of each dance. Then he got carried away and did complicated steps and whirled me around. I laughed and moved along with him somehow. I was very happy.

My mother would have disapproved.

His mother leaned half-way out the window to grab for him, too late, Peter ended sixteen stories down. I cried, Daniel said "He is where he wanted to be now." A few hours longer, and we'd have met at the ball, I was grown, I waited for him to appear, tap Daniel's shoulder and circle with me. They hid the news of his death, and while they tugged his body somewhere, Daniel and I danced all evening in the Grand Ballroom of the hotel he leaped out of.

My mother says the coffin lid was up, summer's first tan tinted his face. It was not yet fully summer, much less fall! With a note of satisfaction she describes how three black flags were raised and lowered over his grave. My mother loves ceremony.

Can the dead see? Phantom, peer into the red radiance of my apartment--you might have lived!

The Latvian newspaper printed a short article disclaiming any connection with his death, saying he had had a history of mental problems--it was no failure of the Latvian society! There was a blurred grey photograph of his face. It looked as if it held clenched life.

Daniel says to me, "Lie down, let the pain go out of you." As it went from him, flat, smashed? Too easily, much too easily ...

There are two foam pads covered with shiny green nylon that we lay out on the floor to sleep on when Daniel stays at my place. We call them our teddy bears. He gets me some aspirin and a glass of water. I lie down and he massages my neck and back.

I am going to move in with Daniel, it's settled now. I live on the leftovers of my meals with Daniel. I wonder just how strongly I do live on the strength of knowing him.

YOUR PART IN THE CONTINUING BATTLE AGAINST
THE THREAT OF CONTEMPORARY ROCK MUSIC

NEWS ITEM

CHICAGO (UPI)--Suggestive lyrics on radio, and television violence have more effect on children than their parents and teachers, according to Illinois School Superintendent Joseph P. Cronin and a Harvard psychiatrist. "We are losing the battle for childrens' minds to the television and radio media," Cronin said at a series of workshops on media ethics sponsored by Operation PUSH. Cronin said, a recent study indicated that 92 percent of children born out of wedlock were conceived while contemporary rock music was playing.

The Beacon-News
Aurora, Illinois
1/15/77

Hoist your knickers kiddies and listen up. No one was more shocked by the statistics listed in the above clipping than your current reporter. It's been quite some time since I've heard news stories blaming contemporary rock music for every social malady from common acne and cancer, to the inability to utter coherent sentences of anything more than three mono-syllabic words. I for one am not proud to admit that I've become terribly lax in this regard. I've also become terribly irregular but that's of no import here.

At any rate (the cheaper the better), I feel it's high time that we heed the implied warning of these studies

and launch a full-fledged assault against this still potent foe -- contemporary rock music. In order to obtain additional research material with which to initiate my campaign against this dreaded threat, I enlisted the learned services of one Rod (Big One) MacTavish, noted contemporary rock scientist and author of the semi-best selling, Getting It Regular -- Or What Not To Say In a Gay Bar. Rod is known for blocks around, for his in-depth studies of young girls and domestic animals. In the interest of objectivity I reproduce unedited excerpts from my interview with him below:

Q. Rod, is it true that at one time you had proved conclusively that 92 percent of all children born out of wedlock were conceived while the Los Angeles Lakers were playing on the road -- and if so, how do you explain the current study citing contemporary rock music as the culprit?

A. Coincidence. The fact that the percentages are identical can only imply that a supreme being definitely exists; that, or the commission responsible for the study just faked their results like I did.

Q. But all seriousness aside, Rod, how can contemporary rock music be singlehandedly to blame for these tremendous findings?

A. Well, you have to remember that today's teenagers, like their counterparts of the past, are generally not over-endowed with an excess of cerebral potency. Back in the old days, kids received damn little instruction as to the functioning of their sexual apparatus and therefore, were seldom treated to a surprise visit from the stork. The odds were just plain against it. But today's kids, on the other hand, have just to flick on a radio for simplified, biological instructions, usually in rhyme and with a danceable beat. It certainly cuts down on the margin of error.

Q. Overall, what do you think of the commission's findings?

A. Frankly, I'd rather spend an hour with an assortment of barnyard fowl, but I find one aspect of the report quite interesting indeed. The report states that 92 percent of all children born out of wedlock were conceived while contemporary rock music was playing, but makes absolutely no mention of the remaining 8 percent. Now over the course of several years this 8 percent could amount to an extraordinary number of the little bastards, and I feel its most important to include them in any final evaluation. After conducting exhaustive studies on my own, I submit that the remaining 8 percent to 4 percent were conceived during news, weather and sports breaks; 3 percent while McDonald's and various acne medicine commercials were being aired, and fully one percent were conceived during the playing of Irish Rover's and/or Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians records.

Q. Do you think Bobby Orr will ever play again?

A. Another good question, however, not one deserving of attention in this particular satire, schmuck.

Bolstered by the above material, I sought out one more expert on the subject of contemporary rock music and its effects on today's morality, 19-year-old William Smith from West Oxnard, California. A senior at Earl Butz Jr. Senior High School in Oxnard, William, known as Bill to some of his close friends, is a quarterback on his school's football squad, captain of the baseball and rugby teams, a conference swimming champ, All-State basketball guard, member of the debate and rhetoric teams, class valedictorian, a Southern California Surfer's Association past-Grand Champion, and lead guitarist and vocalist for a popular local rock band. When I informed Bill, or William, as he's known to short writers, of the contents of the commission's report on contemporary rock music, which, due to the fact that he cannot read, he had no prior knowledge of, he responded incredulously, "Like, oh wow man, its like ya'know, I can dig, like, ya'know -- oh wow man, its kinda like -- that's a real trip, man, like if ya'know what I mean, if ya'know where I'm comin' from!"

Encouraged by his articulate reply, I proceeded to the big question, "William, have you found contemporary rock music to have been an asset to you in your deflowering and subsequent impregnation of some 60 high school girls, by your own count?"

"Well havin' a 10-inch wazoo didn't exactly hurt, you wimp," he answered, "but yeah, yeah I guess you could say that contemporary rock music helped me get my weenie wet on several occassions. And I mean, like ya'know, more than once is the time I've gotten lipstick on my dipstick just for knowin' when to turn on a Mick Jagger or a Robert Plant tune. The chicks man, like they just seem to get into it better, and I know I sure do, if ya'know what I mean, sleaze brain. But lately since Elton's come out of the closet and admitted to being "bi," I don't rely on his records like I used to -- its kinda risky, if ya can dig it."

The time is ripe for action. But first you've gotta get mad. You've gotta get up, go to the window, open it and shout, "I'm made as shucks, consarn it, and I'd really rather not take it anymore -- unless of course you absolutely insist, and oh yeah, down with contemporary rock music."

If we can save our teenagers from being corrupted as youths, they can wait till they're adults to be corrupted -- when they're much better equipped for it. Join my crusade by sending whatever you can: cash, checks, negotiable securities, property deeds, to:

SAVE THE WORLD FROM DREAD CONTEMPORARY ROCK MUSIC,
PO Box 69, Begonia Falls, N.Y.

Your contribution is tax deductible.

GOING TO THE DOCTOR

To my surprise there wasn't a single soul in the lobby of the Medical Center. This Medical Center is one of those rat hole apartments no bigger than a hot-dog stand. I'll bet that if a thief goes to rob the safe, all he'll find is stack upon stack of white filing cards with DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC AID--CASE NO. 08--241--814205 or CASE NO. 98--283--384485 written on the upper right hand corner. The mud was there, on the carpet. And the shadows of people holding green cards were there....

"I want to see the doctor," I said to the secretary. I had to stoop a little to make sure that my voice went through the hole on the glass.

"Are you going to pay?" She was a student at Wells, or her boyfriend was. He had to be on the football team if he wore a sweater that could fit that secretary. "Are you going to pay?" she asked, quite roughly I might add.

"Why yes! Of course I'm going to pay!"

"Well you better give me the money in advance because this ... "Portorican" guy just walked out of here without paying."

"How much is it for a visit?" I asked timidly.

"Ten dollars."

Behind this burly Wells scholar sat an old man. He was obviously her grandpa, but also could've been the brother of the two Great Danes that lay piled one on top of the other on an easy chair next to him. The secretary took my address and all that meaningless crap with an expression of "Aha! Now you're fucked. If you try n' play us dirty, we'll send you a letter bomb!"

"What 'a you wan'na see the doctor for?"

"It's rather personal," I said, and she looked straight at my crotch.

"Well can't you tell me?"

"Well, you see it's...kind of personal, you know?"
My hands gave me away. I was--without realizing it--touching my groin.

The Wells-sweatered secretary sort of smiled, and after taking my money, she got up and led me to the doctor's room. The whole place had a weird shape. The secretary's office was a weird pentagon, the lobby, a triangular rectangle, and the hall to the doctor's room was like a labyrinth.

By the time we got through the blood pressure, temperature routine, the doctor knew I went to school (meaningless fact), where I worked (another meaningless fact), that I was a musician, what I did in my spare time (breathe), etc., etc., *trivialis ad infinitum*.

He himself played the violin, thirty or so years ago when he was in his twenties. They played for small weddings, for fun and for booze; he and his friend George, his cousin Sam, and Sam's cousin Terry. "Not Terry--Joan's son, but Terry--Terry. Vioccas' step-son."

I was sick of all this garbage he was telling me. Who was the patient, him or me? Who asked the personal questions, me or him? While he talked on and I nodded at every pause, I took a good look around the office walls to see if I could find his doctor's degree certificate. There it was, with faded pictures of the 1946 graduating class. They were all crew-cutters, College Men, as they used to be called. Now it's kid, college kid. I tried to see where my doctor was. Was he on the top pictures or was he on the bottom? I couldn't tell. He still wore his crew-cut, probably out of loyalty to his barber. But in thirty years a man does change. Maybe he wore those thick bottle-bottom glasses with the thick plastic framing. Now he wore tinted glasses, with metal framing.

"Go lay on that table," he said very casually.

"Nobody is going to tell me that he didn't get that bunk at the Second Hand for Doctor's Utensils just down the street on Milwaukee Avenue. I laid on the table without misgivings, but then he came and sat beside me, pushing my legs over with his butt. "Is he a faggot?" I thought. He was rambling on about the Lawrence Welk Show and their spanish singer "Lolita" or "Maria" or whatever American name they had given her.

"Unzip and lower your pants," said the doctor. I swear that at that instant--by some weird trick of the mind--I heard the theme of the Untouchables. Well, maybe I've been exposed for too long to the propaganda, mixed with radiation emanating from my TV.

I lowered my pants quite gingerly, and you can imagine how I felt at that moment. I mean, you know what it is to come into the seclusion of this stranger's office, laying on his table and then lowering your pants to him? As if that wasn't enough, my dear doctor, with all the confidence in the world, and with a candid grin on his face, like that of a man who has been in jail for some time, lowered the front of my Fruit-of-

the-Looms, raking, with his probably well-kept fingernails, my pubic hair.

After he examined all three things, like one who examines a bare, pimpled chicken a last time before scalding it in hot water, the doctor introduced his pinky, or "auricular digit," deep into the larger cavities of the body, out of which protrude the testicles. Or, to put it plainly, he stuck his pinky all the way up where your balls hide when it's cold outside.

"Cough!" he said. And 'cough' I did. "Cough!" he said again, and again I coughed. Then, the doctor, (Notice I call him The Doctor. It's because I don't even remember his name. That's how much of a stranger he seems to me now.) the Doctor, our dear doctor, went over to his desk and jotted something down in a pensive sort of way.

"Ok. Come over here beside the desk. NO--(irritated tone) don't button up your pants. Walk right over here."

"I'll kill this mother-flower if he tries anything funny." Imagine how stupid I felt, walking from the table where I lay, to the desk with my pants down at my knees.

He gripped me right under my left buttock and again stuck his "auricular digit" all the way up behind my left ball. I could feel my "deferent conduit" mashing against my "pubis" bones. "Cough!" he cried. And I coughed, feeling the sharp prick on the gut he had pinched. "Cough!"

"This bastard wants me to walk out of here with a 'coagulated deferent conduit'!" I thought.

He stuck his pinky deep behind my right ball and pinched my other conduit.

"Cough!"

"Ouch!"

"Again!"

"Ouch. Ouch!"

"Cough!"

"Ouch! Fuck-You!"

"I don't find anything wrong with you young man. You definitely don't have a rupture, and that is what the symptoms would seem to indicate."

"Would seem to indicate" --how I loathe cop language!

He sat back then, holding his glasses in place by the right stem. He was waiting for the thousands of questions he has seen on my face through the examination. My balls were getting cold because the office was heated only by a small electric heater in a corner where it could keep only the doctor warm. My balls were already up to my chest, when I finally said something. "Can I button up my pants now?"

"Yes. You can button them up. Look," he quickly added, "do you have a lot of problems at home? First of all, do you have kids?"

"Nope." I replied. "Not yet. You see my wife and I believe it's a big decision...."

"Do you have a lot of heated arguments with her?"

"Well, besides the usual hack-and-tear of marital arguments...."

"Usual, you say?"

"Why yes," I replied, feeling I had revealed too much. (I had revealed that I wasn't successful, ooooh, deadly, deadly.)

By the sardonic grin on his face I could tell that the great Majewski or Săjewski or Methewski, (whatever his name was,) had come to a conclusion. He turned nervously to his desk and wrote up three prescriptions faster than you can say "Catilangua Lentamuey," which, I can guess, is not too fast, (and that's why I wrote it in the first place.)

I was getting ready to leave. I got my coat on and noticed as I turned to button it, a rusty porcelain basin sitting on the arm of a second-hand, dentist chair. What the hell, I thought, I feel sorry for whoever gets caught on that abomination under the skillful hands of our doctor over here. He'll probably make the patient gargle with used listerine, and then with some second-hand pair of pliers, made of steel recovered from the Merrimack, he will remove the poor patient's second-hand, cavity stricken molars.

"You have a lot of problems, Amigo. And if you don't solve them you'll get an ulcer." He wanted to surprise me with his verdict, and he did. He didn't even give me a chance to ask him if it was terminal, and went on to say: "That pain you feel in your groin is actually a gut that has cramped from nervous tension. It's a means by which your body is telling you that it cannot take the stress any longer."

"Oh come on," I thought, "what kind of bullshit is this? Another of Dr. Mark Welby's snot jerkers?"

But the doctors face was sincere. He was an older man, of more experience than most shackled people I knew. He was a veteran at ulcers and had lived to a ripe old age of fifty. So I listened (with one ear) to his Neuro-philosophic diagnosis and prognosis.

To all his bullshit I said, Yes, Yes, Yes. "Yes 'em to death and destruction," as the Invisible Man said, seeing brother Jack's glass eye pop out of its nervy, scarlet socket and roll down the length of a table.

As I walked out of the Medical Center I felt like re-cycled man. Not like a new man, no. Not in 1977. (If Christ were sitting now on Mount Olivos, diving into a crater everytime an Arab or Israeli machine gun went rah-tah-tah-tah, he would have said; "Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be re-cycled, he cannot see the kingdom of God.")

Boe, boe, boe, would I have one to lay on Rosemary everytime she started bitching. Everyday when she came from work, I'd take all the medicine bottles out of the pantry and line them up on the table to remind her that the doctor said that she was giving me an ulcer.

"Just like your mother gave your father one!"

GOOD STEW

There was once a small village, by a mountain, which had good stew. So good was this stew that men from miles around would make pilgrimages to this town. And always they would be satisfied, and warmed, and provided for with good stew. Now stew is not that hard to come by, but good stew can make a man come in out of the coldest nights. And so... many men would be seen walking well bundled along the snow covered roads, warming their hands with vaporous steam from their huge smiling mouths, laughing heartily, as the moonlight sparkled through the tall pines, and their brawny hearts warmed with hardy anticipation of good stew.

It is said that the better the meat the better the stew. And on a cold night what man would not nod his head with pleasure as good, thick meat browns and simmers and gurgles in a boiling pot of good stew. Why to sit at a large dark wood table by a roaring fire and just listen to a hot bubbling stew...and to inhale the luscious aromatic blend of steaming vegetables...can make a man most impatient...until at last he pounds the table with his fist and cries out: "GOOD STEW NOW!"

Now there was a man among men who had that lean and hungry look, indeed. And though none could argue that this village hadn't good, good stew, it was rumored that there lived a woman on top of the mountain who made stew that no man could resist, and that many a man had climbed that mountain to sample her stew...but not one had ever returned. "I shall climb that mountain..." the young man whispered, "and I shall taste her stew." And his eyes followed the sparkling gleam that danced from the moonlight upon a snow covered path, a path which led up and around tall, firm pines which grew from that mountain, that very mountain upon which sat the woman's old, old, cottage. He watched the smoke which poured

out from the chimney, and rose and wove its wispy way to dance before the moon, and lace it with the scent of good stew. "I shall climb that mountain NOW!" And as if the wispy film had ears it turned its lingering way from the moon in the midnight's sky, and slowly beckoned him upward, up the mountain and to the cottage...where his meal would be ready and warm.

Yes...a warm and ready meal can bring a man out of the cold night's air. For there are men who dream in the night of pounds and pounds of boneless meat, trimmed of fat and bountiful. And there are men, lean and hungry men, who like to chew the fat, so to speak...and so, untrimmed meat covered with fat and clinging to the bone, and stuck deep into a huge fomenting, ebullient, concoction of boiling white potatoes, and onions round and large as apples, covered with parsley sprigs and carrots, and pounds of ripe red tomatoes, peeled, seeded, juiced, and chopped... Oh!--the poaching pulp from pounds and pounds of firm, juicy tomatoes make such good soup...such good sauce...AND SUCH GOOD STEW!

And so...the lean and hungry man was up and climbing. Now he had climbed many a mountain, and he was light and nimble on his feet, and could dance and leap over the snow and weave his way between tall pines in no time at all. But whenever he would look down at the small, warm village so far below, to gauge how far he had climbed, his heart would grow weary as he looked back up toward the cottage, and found that it appeared no closer at all...

To spur himself upward he would repeat different cuts for stewing: Rump Pot Roast, Sirloin Tip, Chuck Pot Roast, Top Round, and Bottom Round...for good, good stew. When his spirit would grow impatient he would comfort himself with the thought that good stews take 3 to 4 hours of simmering depending on the quality and tenderness of the meat.

But thoughts can sustain a man only so long, and... without the proper nourishment...he lay face down in the snow, feeling cold and wet, with a weary burning pain in his tight sinewy muscles, and a hollow creaking ache in his bones...for he had fallen, fallen next to a huge round boulder of snow which pressed firmly against the base of a tall, firm pine. Craning his neck he allowed his eyes to walk up the bark and into the branches of the huge pine which seemed proud and noble; pushing upward toward the sparkling stars and into the dark, moonlit sky. If it weren't for the crackling pain in the back of his neck he would have counted the stars for hours...so drained and weary he was. He let his chin drop to rest upon his hands and could feel the wet, cool wash from a light coating of snow on his knuckles; he rolled his eyes to the side and back and forth a little bit until they vaguely focused on the huge white boulder...and he thought about the many men like he who had ventured up this mountain...would he find their snow covered bones along the path? Perhaps they died of pneumonia

in their struggle up the mountain and became a good meal for beasts of prey... Maybe in spite of their strong desire they had never tasted this good stew... Or perhaps a cannibal lived in this cottage and made a good meal out of them...! But such thoughts were morbid and he would not listen to fear; and man among men that he was, he pushed himself up from the glistening damp snow and looked toward the cottage, as a huge, white, wispy lace of smoke rushed out of the chimney and into the midnight sky, saying.....YES.

Soon he could see the cottage rising above the trees, and the bright moon behind it, and the forest started to fill with the sound of hot bubbling stew...and there...there in the window he could see a woman's shadow. The black outline of long flowing hair swayed over her back as her arms stirred a hot bubbling overture of...good stew.

He pushed his weary, aching body forward and started to stumble, but a wisp of smoke rushed out and around his neck, pushing under his nose to fill his nostrils with beefing, hot, boiling cabbage and wonderful herbs and spices. He tripped forward deliriously, following the hearty, fortifying sustenance leading him to the cottage.

And over the loud bubbling sound of boiling hot, good stew he experienced the full authority of the woman's commanding voice stirring up and pounding out and filling the air with:

Boiling a cabbage
IN MY POT!
Great big potatoes
NICE AND HOT!
Boiling a cabbage
THROUGH AND THROUGH!
Thick hearty beef
GOOD GOOD STEW!

Such words filled his lean and hungry heart with desire, the saliva lushing from his mouth while he ran toward the cottage, clawing the air in front and growling wolfishly to the words that she commanded out on that moonlit night:

Outside it's cold
BUT INSIDE IT'S HOT!
Boiling together
IN MY POT!
Outside it's lonely
THE WIND HOWLS TOO!
But inside it's boiling
GOOD GOOD STEW!!!!!!!!!!

And he burst through the door with a hunger and panting that he had never known before. "AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHA-HA-HA-HA!!!!!!" a woman's voice screamed out, "GOOD STEW TONIGHT SOON!" Orange flames and bubbling vapor obscured the woman but he could see that she was old and naked and her eyes seemed to burn like flaming red coals! Her hair swirled and danced,

bringing leaping shadows and two sagging breasts which slapped out as she opened her arms-LUSTFUL! FUMING! RAGE! - scalding his heart while her huge gurgling pot foamed up and overflowed...

Early in the morning, just before the sun would rise, he would feed in her gurgling pot again...and, once again, it would foam up and over low. "So good is this stew," he thought, "that I shall never leave her pot." And the days and nights would pass, and always he would be by her pot. Sometimes she would add clove and nutmeg and--herbs that he could not recognize but only drool over--to her pot. And he would prepare thick, earthy carrots and fresh mushrooms that felt silken to the touch with gills slightly open for boiling in good good stew.

The days passed into years, and he grew fat and content... Until one dark and cold night his lean and hungry heart returned to yearn for good stew from strange and foreign pots. So he quietly squeezed himself through the cottage door, and taking a final look back at her wonderful pot he tripped... and in his fattened state he rolled and rolled down the hill, picking up speed and lots of snow until he crashed through the forest and came to a halt next to a huge boulder of snow resting against a tall pine.

That night strange shrieking laughter could be heard circling over the mountain...as two huge boulders of snow rested firmly against a tall, proud pine rushing noble into the midnight sky (indeed everything was as it should be) and down below...hearty happy men would come out of the dark, cold night and into the village for...GOOD GOOD STEW.

A HOLIDAY WITH DAD

The Coup de Ville cruised to a stop before a wooden gate. A blockhouse, with tinted glass, sat between two strips of asphalt. I expected a barrel-chested man to emerge from within, cradling a shot-gun mirrored in the lenses of his sunglasses. Instead a skinny guard, wearing a black cowboy hat zapped the car's windshield with a device resembling a television channel-selector. Showing no emotion in his face, he waved us through.

"Now that's security!," my father cleared his throat to emphasize the point. The car surged forward squealing it's rear tires against the asphalt. I felt my body being sucked back into the front seat.

"I always thought security was a state of mind." I nervously fingered my bead.

"State of mind! Why where's your mind been for the last twenty-five years." He winced illuminating his crows-feet.

"See these condominiums. Do you think people live here for a lark? We all have investments to protect. Wake up! This is the last quarter of the Twentieth century. Privacy is sacred! It must be protected at all costs," he raised his voice unconscious that he was yelling.

The setting sun caused the highrises to appear as burning pillars. A carpet of grass, spotted with pockets of white sand, zigzagged among the buildings. A ten foot cyclone fence played hide and seek with my line of sight as the car followed the curve of the road. Pusted rolls of barbed-wire snaked above the fence.

"What are those canister-devices in the wire?", I asked.

"Trip flares. When they ignite, security releases trained cheetahs. They don't fuck around! A migrant worker, who climbed the fence in daylight, had his spleen torn out. At night, the cyclone is electrified. Nothin' gets in then," he laughed as if there was great humor in his word.

"Must cost plenty to live here!"

"You get what you pay for. At least smart people do. We have it all here: churches, schools, theatres, restaurants, and even a hospital. If I would've known about this development twenty years ago, you might not have had to work at all for a living."

The care disappeared into the artificial light of an underground garage complete with gas pumps, grease racks, and other servicing equipment.

"Are you working, son?"

"Not presently," I cautiously replied.

"If you want a real man's job, go into business. You will find just what work means then, believe me."

We climbed into an elevator. Before my knees could snap, we faced a large hardwood door. Inside a small, mirrored vestibule of the apartment, I removed my coat. I expected to see the windows fortified with sandbags and fitted with machine guns. The stereo played Silent Night softly. I turned my attention from a newspaper ad, "What Christmas Means to You," to that of the dark outline of an old woman who sat stiffly in a French chair.

"What's happened to Gramma?" I kissed her cool cheek.

"Your grandmother was getting on--what with her shortness of breath. Besides financially--she was becoming something of a burden to us. I admitted her to the hospital here at the development. The director assured me that she would go to heaven as quickly and as quietly as possible."

"That's criminal!," I ranted.

"Haven't you read the papers, son. Now the state has legalized the unthinkable. The patriarch of every family has the power to liquidate any tribal member who isn't living up to intended expectation," his eyes grew large and white.

"What!?!," I asked incredulously.

"Oh yes. The governor signed it into law last week. Who knows, within a few years, we could have a state to be proud of--as soon as we trim some excess fat. You do want to be on the winning team, don't you son?"

He stirred his glass of scotch with his little finger.

My grandmother's lips were sewn together with fine wire. Her blue-gray hair sparkled, as if synthetic and stitched into her scalp.

"Gramma's heart is enclosed in a glass case on the mantle. Why the hospital thoughtfully imprinted our family crest, three howling dogs, on it. A heating mechanism inserted in her anal tract keeps her at room temperature. She's guaranteed for a full year."

"I don't feel so well." My grandmother's image, sitting immobile in a black dress, revolved in my mind until I became dizzy. I sat down in a chair, and the room focused. Gramma's pulsating heart beat as if it was a conscience.

"What makes it beat?" I asked.

"A spring-mounted pendulum. Excuse me while I change for the evening meal ceremony."

I wanted to leave, but my feet felt frozen to the floor. Do money and power through time corrupt a man's mind?

My father, wearing white robes and sandals, swished into the room. With a flapping palm, he motioned me to the table. Something resembling a huge fowl, with only its chest and thighs intact, lay on a platter. We sat down, and dad reached under the table. Two large-headed microphones swung up. The lights dimmed. Father's voice filled the apartment. The garment hung from his wrists.

"Lord, Oh Lord, come join us at our table. Bless our food. Save us from unexpected losses, financial or otherwise. Give us growth, healthy economic growth. Lord give strength to help ourselves more often to whatever we desire. Bless Gramma, Lord. Treat her well in your heavenly paradise. And Bless Yolanda, my wife." He glanced at the empty place setting at the other end of the oval table.

"Where's mother?"

"Ya see son, I had to take her to the hospital...."

THE TALE OF SUDBURY

Long ago in a little English village called Sudbury, a young man named Peter was plowing a field when he found a small pocket mirror. Now it just so happened that a looking glass was an unheard of thing in Sudbury. Even the girls did not know what their faces looked like except hearing the description their lovers gave of their personal beauty. It was the first time in his life that Peter had ever seen such a thing. He looked at it, and to his astonishment, he saw the image of pale face, with blue, intelligent eyes, and the look of awe-struck wonderment on the features. As he gazed into the pocket mirror, he thought to himself, "This is a portrait of my father. What would his portrait be doing here? Perhaps it is some kind of warning."

He took a handkerchief out of his pocket, wrapped his precious treasure in it, and then put it into his back pocket. When he went home that night he hid it carefully away in an old wooden, handcarved box. He mentioned nothing about it to his young wife.

For several days Peter was in a great state of excitement. He constantly thought about the portrait, and at intervals, he would leave his work in the fields and suddenly appear at home to take a look at his treasure. Now in England, as in other countries, mysterious actions and irregular proceedings of all kinds have to be explained to a wife. Mary, Peter's wife, could not understand why her husband kept appearing at all hours of the day. So Mary began to observe, and she noticed that he never left until he had been alone in the little room at the back of the house. She searched day after day to see if she could find some trace of anything in the little room which was at all unusual, but she found nothing.

One day she walked into the room and saw Peter replacing the hand carved box. The moment he had gone, she opened the box. To her amazement, she saw a portrait of a woman.

A fit of anger overcame her, and she gazed into the pocket mirror again. The same face looked at her, but she wondered how her husband could admire such a wicked face. She had not heart left for anything, and did not make any attempt to prepare dinner for Peter. When Peter arrived home, he was surprised to find nothing ready for him.

"We have not even been married a year, and you're starting to treat me like we've been married twenty! What is the meaning of this?"

"What do you mean? The idea of it; your keeping portraits in my wooden carved box! Here! Take it and treasure it, for I do not want it."

"I cannot understand you," Peter said.

"Oh you can't?" Mary said. "You like that hideous, wicked woman more than your own wife."

Peter could not believe what he was hearing. "Mary, that portrait is the living image of my father. I found it in the field and put it in the carved box for safety."

"You think I do not know a woman's face from a man's."

Things really became serious. It seemed as if the married life, which before had been filled with happiness, was to be completely spoiled and made miserable by this mysterious portrait.

Peter was wild with indignation. The accusation made by his wife was perfectly ridiculous. Of course the portrait was not that of a woman, but of his father, it was impossible that he could be mistaken.

The loud, angry words were overheard by a priest who was passing the house. He stopped and listened for a moment. It was probably some slight misunderstanding which he would soon put a stop to.

"My children," he said, putting his head inside the door, "why all this anger? Why this dispute?"

"Father, my wife is mad."

"All women are that way, my son, more or less. You were wrong to expect perfection. It is no use getting angry."

"My husband has a portrait of a woman hidden in a wooden carved box."

"I swear that I have no portrait of a woman, but only one of my dead father."

The priest then asked to see the portrait. He took the glass and looked at it earnestly. He then bowed down before it, and in an altered tone, said, "My children, settle your quarrel and live peaceably together. You are both in the wrong. This is a portrait of a saintly priest. I don't know how you could mistake such a holy face."

The priest then blessed them, and left, carrying with him the glass to place with other precious relics of the church.

SCHOOL FOR FAMOUS SURREALISTS

Hello, and welcome. Thank you for your interest in the School for Famous Surrealists. You don't know me, but who does, my little liverwurst? I'm Dexter LaBrea. I'm proud to speak to you and all of your selected friends about the school. By the time we're finished chatting today, I hope you will have divined the answer to that most personal of questions which is a boiling concern of at least two per cent of the surnamed American populace today: "Are You A Surrealist?"

Who am I to be qualified to ask that question, you may ask. (You may ask, go ahead. I'm not stopping you.) The first thing you should know is a surrealist is judged not by what he says, (which no one can decipher in any case), but by what he does, his actions, if you will (or even if you won't). My behaviour has been obsessive enough to be ignored by persons of all races, creeds and colours. I was elected but refused to serve on the board of the Morton Grove parent-teachers association. I once disrupted a meeting of the Young Republicans by putting raw meat in the buttermilk. I voted for Ben Adamowski. I invented the (erroneous) spelling of the Cambodian city Phnom Phen now in current usage! In short, I have scaled the heights of surrealist ecstasy, and come down with the chili in my thermos still warm.

Now I know some of you must be thinking "Sure, that's fine for the 'artistic' few, but I'm just a drone, an insect, I don't have the 'stuff' it takes to be a surrealist. "Bullshit." Even if you have never laughed your way through The World at War before, there are many surrealist exercises you can do in the privacy of your very own TV set!

1./ Watch the local Spanish-speaking serials with the sound turned off and imagine the dialog as an intricate series of ethnic and scatological epithets between a series of characters. Try not to use the word "spic" more than once every

half hour.

2./ Fantasize having intimate relations with Durwood Kirby.

3./ Masturbate during "5 Minutes to Live By."

4./ Try to imagine what Dinah Shore would be like as a woman.

5./ Try to imagine what Mike Douglas would be like as a man.

Even after performing these simple (to the point of ridiculousness) exercises, you might say "I'm not sure. It sounds easy, but I don't really know."

Well, you wishy-washy bastard, I've proposed this simple test to measure your surrealist I.Q. How much do you know about the lugubrious fat cats and basic tenets of surrealism? A historical justification for a psychological aberration is always useful, especially if the law catches you in one of those scenes involving a fire hydrant, a fourteen year old girl and a scale replica of the docking module of Apollo 13. I know from personal experience. Simply flash your surrealist card and the cops will understand, or at least pretend that they do, which is just as good.

PART ONE: Surrealist History

1./ What does Breton say is the most surrealist act one can commit?

- A. Going into a crowded movie theatre and yelling "fire!"
- B. Going into a crowded fire and yelling "Movie theatre!"
- C. Firing at random into a crowd on the street.
- D. Going into a vegetarian restaurant and gnawing on the waitress' leg.

PART TWO: Surrealist Instinct (Great surrealists are born, not made.)

1./ You see an old blind woman crossing the street with much difficulty. Do you:

- A. Point and Goggle?
- B. Give \$20 to the first motorist that hits her?
- C. Rape her and pawn her clothes?
- D. Tell her a Helen Keller joke.

With regard to the last question, I would be remiss if I did not point out that you are to choose the best answer to any question, irregardless of whether you think it is right.

PART THREE: Multi-Media Surrealism

1./ Which of these is a verbal representation of a great piece of surrealist art?

- A. Magritte's enormous apple filling up a room.
- B. Negro Shavastigid's, The Nostrils of a Golf Pro.
- C. Dieja Rembolini's, A Piece of Cheese Elicits an Erotic Response from the Wallpaper.
- D. Bruce Roberts, A professional basketball team, scores less than eighty points; they cannot expect to win.

PART FOUR: Foundations of the Faith

1./ Which did Lautremont describe as the first true surrealist event?

- A. The chance meeting between an umbrella and a sewing machine on an operating table.
- B. The chance meeting between Cardinal Cody and Walter Jacobson at the Bijou Theatre.
- C. The chance meeting between a piece of meat and a customer at a MacDonald's restaurant.
- D. The chance meeting between the will of the american people and the actions of the congress in August 1974.

Simple, Huh?

Answers: If you don't know, I'm not going to tell you.

Scoring: Well, first you have to try to get her back to your apartment. Then put some smooth music on the stereo, and start dropping little hints about your prowess and size. Then fix her a drink, a joint, a spikeful of demerol, 15 Chol-ral Hydrate, a bagful of glue and a bottle of coke and aspirin. When she passes out, jump on her.

You must realize that these sample questions can only give you a brief hint of the joys in store when you enroll in the course for Famous Surrealists, which has been approved for correspondence credit by the Medical Examiner of Chad. Simply send \$48 dollars in coin (no checks or cash, please) to:

FAMOUS SURREALIST SCHOOL
C/O ANTONIN ARTAUD SCHOOL OF MISMATCHED SOCKS
3431 KATYWINTERS TERRACE
DAS GUPTA, MARYLAND 8400323

Please do not include your name and address. If anything important comes up, I know where to find you. Remember, religion is the oatmeal of the people.

THE ALMOST KING OF THE KOOL GUYS

(SHIT shave hot it is raining) THIS is a remodeled Victorian Oak Park bathroom, historic district, and Bill Miller is pissing gingerly, imagining lonely old clubfighters, tank towns, the faucet damn faucet hisses, he shoulda learned a jab, the rain-spattered windows promise gloom forever.

Monotony:

It is 6 a.m. Wife always hides the blades. As in a dream, he yawns and lathers--use the old blade, Bill, dear--indulgent fingers spider the Gillette foamy flesh. A long time ago he was the 13-year-olds-and-under batting champion of Portage Park. Ball four.

But ouch

Bite down--bud of blood--Nora, find those GOCD. Behind the Mennan, lathered fingers ransack the talcum-sotted medicine cabinet. Where? He would hate to ask HER, hates it when she sees him naked. His paunch--call it a beer gut, Nora, he dabs delicately, please.

Is it still raining? Shit! Morning has malaria. HE has a hangover. Nora, did you hide them? Nora, GIVE ME A BREAK yanking on the spigot A BREAK GODDAM IT NORA the cut stings stings--and for a brief instant, he grinds his teeth--my poor head--it all shrieks out, gushing water, pus of the past present. Nora SCREW

Of course: the inevitable cross current. Through a rising fist of steam, a bilious contorted face emerges-MONGO-ha, ha, aren't we ridiculous, be adult-perhaps, too, its the odor, kitchenward, of bacon--anyway, he poises the blade--rain jabs at the window--the cheek lather-smeared--start--but--but--the sight of the blood blade--also

Also?! !

Yeah! also about the Mustang, sir, your broken reverb differential, also he will have to take the train today, also

that lying fucking mechanic, also also, the whole world is a lying fucking mechanic, also, and piss on the blade, his eyes are bloodshot, betrayed, he bites his lip, ever since the promotion, nothing has gone right. To the accompaniment of a single rattling window, flickering shaving light, skyward, the diarrhea of a summer storm.

I just don't know, Miller, we promoted you to project leader--you SEEMED so ambitious.

Yawn he must shit yawn--will he ever have shit THEIR answer--yawn--can you yawn/shave at the same time his nose itches and what would have looked like with an itches his nose tatoo?

"Oh, Bill, pu-lease, I know how you are...but the bathroom...but the kids...early craft classes this morning."

Hmm, LOVE AND DEATH, wreath of blue chain, or just STRANGLE, ha, ha, New York Time print-type--STRANGLE.

"Bill!" --he puts down the blade, the magic of dreams-- --and palm is pressing cool porcelain and the sky rumbles -- "BILL" --and strangle shimmers like brooding electric flash: mangle jangle STRANGLE---"BI-ILL"--he turns, he blinks-- it is Nora, pu-lease--feel the vowels strAngle choke.

"Bill! Are you listening!"

"yeah! yeah!"--is she laughing? dab lather--then the ignominy--"i'm hurrying, hon, OK?"

STRAN---GEL-----GEL

Miller, if you could just motivate your people

He breathes in, water slices off the blade, steaming water scalds an index finger, fuck it, fuck her, her "Bill, pu-lease!"--the door is shut, fuck he smiles through a halo of foam, a plume of steam, you'd think his name was PILL SMELL SWILL--"Bi-ill, you must pu-lease!"--with a grunt of scorn spleen, he submerges the finger, again, again, feeling pain, feeling the sinewy searing vindication of pain, I don't care, Nora, the steam rises swamp-like, and then flourishing the blade, his tongue an ooze of mysterious chalk, he begins to scrape his face, to dare it to bleed

I DON'T CARE NORA I DON'T

while BI-IILL

while the light

while the fighters grope in musty converted ballrooms

while the dreary old bathroom light flickers fluorescent like a lonely god

Do you remember the time, Bill you almost smacked her?

Is he pussy-whipped?

SO you go along, water off a duck's back, nothing really, ha, ha, then one day, the alarm sort of jangles, or maybe you're late, or the porcelain cold on the feet, but wow, are you nuts, man?! eyes sting!! you were ready to rip that light fixture out of the wall, well, it does flicker, OK, but still--

YOU BITCH NORA

And now, what is this? you're propped almost indolent against the kitchen sink, sipping this stale bitter coffe,

practically a saint in that nomine domine respect, crisp azure natty suit, eyes Murined clear, no loud rings, watches, tie clasps, a sensible cologne: simply (breathe in): Bill Miller, dynamic, career-oriented data processing manager, ldr in fld: so who could guess Vesuvius inside: the barbarians sacking Rome: pillage: rapine. Legend has it that Jack the Ripper wore nice suits too. Your cheek twitches. Goddam it, suck in that beer gut! Amazing how these little things little little. She hadn't made any new coffee. You have to reheat the JUNK from last night. A hand steadies the stuttering cup. NORA-- Nora is by the stove--careful, mon--she's fixing eggs, bacon, something in a brown mug flecked white with (Nora Dorable) something--

If we are what we eat, then what does that make the kitchen? A cathedral? A symposium? Nora? You say the kitchen is a hospital? Things are FIXED here? You say, make the walls white, austere? No plump grandmothers in quaint hoop skirts. Stainless! right? Perhaps, if perhaps is necessary, Navajo wall rug above the stove (must be Navajo). Even the radio streamlined to spit out, completely sterilized, huh, Nora, a host of operating--shi-it!!--utensils

AND here I was, the almost King of The Kool Guys, a junior at De Paul, etc. A metaphysician, even. Or per tempora, as we metaphysicians, like to say, because, well, in the ontological stream of IT, I had just told old Father Caine, De Paul's metaphysician emeritus, I'm quitting, Father. The class was the worst: Christ would have slept through the Crucifixion with Killer Caine at the hammer. I literally floated out of his office. I was three stairs from heaven. I mean, Amen, Amen, no more forms immutable. Then down the hall, this blonde I barely knew, this Nora Quinn in knee high sox and penny loafers, blah! she comes charging after me, all breathless, she wants to talk me out of it. Philosophy, she begins (she was clutching the metaphysics book to her chest, so shy serious) --Philosophy is, get this, the Spark that starts the Fire of Life. I didn't know this girl from Adam, but I remember thinking: it ain't done much for you, kid. She looked so pale. Do you have a vampire for a boyfriend? And goodbye, uh thank you, Miss, uh, Nora, adjusting my authentic madras windbreaker. Then, like a revelation, it comes to me: the obvious, you idiot: if she wanted me in the class all that bad, well, maybe she wanted something more. I said, you feel like some coffee, uh, Nora? figuring fuck it, I know I have a Chem class, but fuck it, man, the almost king of the kool guys was still a virgin, and yes, she would, she had lit up like a bunsen burner. Oh world! that was when I decided that yes I was, I was a philosopher after all.

THE time happened to be 6:31--spurious chatter of eggs, incontrovertible chatter: WMAQ.

"I'm sorry I had to rush you, Bill." Nora.

I was rushed, my dear?

Crapulent: of or pertaining to crapulence, as in "the

crapulent monks."

Now this Bill Miller guy--he likes to play cards--poker mainly, and OK, once in a while, gin--well anyway, cards, y'know, means beer and beer means plural and oh--has it stopped raining? (For the room is all of a sudden engulfed in a yellow chaos of sun stream and Bill's stomach swivels and his eyeballs spin) Stopped (has rain) indeed

And Bill feels sick suck

Ah fuck! It was going to be one of those days. Two Bromos at least, and dyspeptically (malt and hop meteorites crashing mutilatively onto the lower Himalayas) he (burp) said:

"Did I hear you right last night, Nora? Did you say you were taking Astrology lessons--ASTROLOGY!"

Nora: the wise, wary: pivoted, flashing this sclerotic, no other word, sclerotic, arcane, creamy-lipstick Nora-smile.

YOU REALLY LISTEN BILL

"Well, yes, I am," this aloud, with two spoons stirring at once, and talking too, marvelous girl, "the lessons are at the high school. On Wednesday evening. Betty Rogers is going."

"But Betty Rogers--I thought she was pretty sane?"

"So what's so insane about a simple Astrology class?"

"But that--that's that--weird shit!"

The spoon: at attention, Mister! Then came a cough, Nora's cough, and Bill burping, then came the First National Bank of Berwyn, their choral group, to enlighten all Chicagoland, completely sterilized, to the vagaries here! now! of (that sclerotic smile again, Nora) interest rates

BUT NO NO answer

Didn't he want to say: Astrology is...Catholics never...ah, hah, Babylonians eat bad pork...

She had lit a cigarette

But c'mon, Nora (said instead) what IS Astrology? poof deflate blah

Her tongue played with the inside of a cheek. In keeping with certain trends--what?--whose?--pink fingernails! pink toenails! her hair is coifed in a fashionable streaked blonde bun! Extraordinarily, he had bitten his tongue. Bitten it-iot. Astrology is, Nora began, and Bill felt fright at first, then anger. Astrology! Nora meanwhile had gone back to her stirring (SHE KNEW HE WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND). Neither one of them chanced a look at each other. Outside, it was a Doris Day dawn, sunny 70, plump pearls of rain gracing sun-spanked windows like the teardrops of a crystal chandelier and as Nora, stirring, filled the room with her dream... History of Astrology...Now Virgos they have...her voice hard cool...Bill found a chair under a recessed fluorescent light of AMA-approved delicacy and filled HIS dream with Camel smoke. If she'd just shut up, puff, my tongue, I'd tell her...

WAIT, Nora, you said what???

I'm playing tennis twice a week with Betty Rogers (this another Doris day, at dinner, the day the budgets oh God! came out) You ought to take it up Bill. It'd do you good.

Nora, some of us have a job--

Well (her eyelids poised like trigger's) well, isn't housewiving a job. Isn't it, Mr. Hardworker. He felt those eyes. Think of fire without light. He hadn't married those eyes. She was patting thin, precise lips with a napkin. Unconsciously, he covered his plate: fatty potatoes, gravy, butter and Astrology is. she was eating cottage cheese.

Its a beer gut, Nora.

"DOC she just doesn't understand. I'm 34. At work, I got so much pressure. My heart--sometimes, it just starts to flutter. These broads. They don't understand pressure."

The Doc was a kind, grey old guy, Oak Park Irish Catholic, his breath reeked of cigar smoke.

"Yeah, son, breathe in."

At the end of the examination, the two men swapped brands, cigar cigarette smoke swimming blue grey above the oath of Hippocrates. THEY understood.

TO be 34 (already), then 38, then...He puffed on his Camel. Sun and bacon smell pursued him, his wife other-worldly in the flowing inflammable-looking gown he had bought last Christmas, she was adding: Now Aquarians have this tendency...while the sunlight began to make this-worldly the gauzy nightgowned silhouette of breasts and thighs, and outside dew evaporated, someone had left a lawn mower out all night...he breathed hard. He could see taut arched breasts...

OAK PARK IS AN ALL-AMERICAN COMMUNITY, SAY MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM (BILL) MILLER. FURTHER...

MARCIA was awake. His daughter. Seven, blonde. Like the sun, she seemed to shimmer into the room in a pool of blonde: her hair blonde flowing, blonde nightgown, suntanned blonde features. He called her Cotton, or yes, Blondie. Their younger daughter, Nicole, was his favorite, darker, prettier 4-year old. Princess, as in Princess, sit on my knee...

But this morning, Marcia, this bloneness, he said: "C'mere, Cotton." Cotton looked just like her mother, magically, almost mythically blonde, and yet (and this was what he wanted): the same prim features: austere, elongated forehead, chiseled nose, jaw. Too spare in a word, and there wasn't a goddam thing in the Zodias to change THAT. As soon as she was on his lap, he began to finger the frayed ruffles of her nightgown and kiss those very features, sweet gentle love whispers, preceeded by a voice loud enough to reach the stove: "You have such a pixie nose, cut l'il nubbin forehead..." How could she SHE retort? The child's forehead is as homely as mine--say it, Nora--she'll have to wait until tennis, until

she can wear a genuine Navajo headband, contacts. And the fire blazed: fire without light/wreath of chains/I may be fat/not ugly/love/hate. it all turned into the ashes of a gagging sort of giggle. Teehee Cotton. He blew smoke into Cotton's ear which Cotton loved. Laughter giddy like the scent of Cotton's hair and he blew more smoke.

I guess she doesn't even listen

Nora had not uttered a murmur. The kitchen was suddenly lifeless: was this bad art? Maybe it is a hospital? He let down Cotton and limp as a rag doll she slumped to the floor, this sleepy flaxen ball. With lips love whisper parched, he stubbed out his cigarette.

Was this what pawed park benched are like?

Say something, Nora, his lungs wheezing oh so softly, while in another room, another life, he thought he could he could hear above this thickening sickening blister of silence Nora's voice, and it WAS Nora's voice, a mingling of both their voices, countless voices, curling endless timeless into space, yes always Bill Nora talking talking

I BELIEVE in John Kennedy, Bill, and Bill nods, sniffing, because here in the Student Union, he will never--NEVER --separate her voice and the smell of sizzling styrofoam. Day after day, among the jocks, the cripples, every greasy Chem Major in captivity, it pours out: Kennedy, Bill, the Peace Corps, Bill (the Navajos come later), with her knee sox askew, her glasses crooked, she seems so different, while he --the Almost Kool Guy, Big Bill, see my hot GTO--he stubs x times y infinite Camels onto the virginal styrofoam, his mind returning, like some demented lockwinged homing pigeon, to the home of his virginal heart: the ontology, the metaphysics of the seduction of Nora: now a motel on Mannheim...now satin sheets...now a shower together, Nora, baby...and oh yeah, the Peace Corps, Nora...sure Kennedy...

His friends--they all think he's nuts. She's a dog. She talks too much. ASSHOLES. They don't understand. If she's a dog, she'll fuck. If she doesn't have any friends, she'll fuck. If she has NEVER fucked, she'll fuck. With this girl--FINALLY--he doesn't feel like a DP. He can skip the English Leather, he doesn't have to be Henny Youngman. I like hockey, Nora, I mean: I REALLY like it. The fuck will come, just keep pressuring her, Billy boy. Like that ash on the styrofoam, one day it'll burn through...to fruition... completion...to styroFUCKness. They'll go to Aladdin's Castle Inn on Mannheim. Fuck me, Billy boy. Its gonna sizzle all the way...

"YOU go brush your teeth Marcia, you've craft classes very shortly."

Hmm

Toast is popping Nora talking.

Another Nora voice revealed here, Nora of the Whispers --Oh Cotton--he can hear his pumping heart--oh Cotton, the

Meeting and Parting of those NippleNora limbos of Lust-- Mommy has cleavage, kid--he wants to fondle thay nylon satin tricotted gown, \$15.95, Chirstmas special.

He had to cross his legs. On the table (Nora is a Princess) simmered eggs, the bacon, eager acolytes. There was coffee, FRESH, good tits. He felt almost revived, almost, save for the capitol T tirades. YOU BITCH NORA (But I'm the Asshole) but he wanted to make it up, honest.

Cotton had vanished: like a rainbow: no traces.

Bill, was this the room that Joan of Arc saw her visions? The Madonna had her hair set? White represents the purity of dreams. A flutter of pastel curtains revealed some hidden refuge of Bill's memory and the refrigerator hummed.

"How's Cotton doing in the craft classes?" Bill wondered after a moment, cautiously.

Nora's eyes rose from the salt shaker which rose from the plate. She didn't look like (mark those words: LOOK LIKE) Lizzy Borden on a tear.

"Her coloring is improving..." --very softly.

He nodded his head...feel the glow of white kitchen walls...he was sipping coffee, his tongue balanced on the cup edge. Once, in the long ago, hadn't a lissome tongue turned her on? Nora?

He asked her about the lawn. Was it coming in?

She shook her head, mumble, then seemed to remember Cotton. Pointing with a fork, she said: "See the drawings on the refrigerator? Will you notice how the people are in exact proportion to the surroundings. Studies show that's very healthy."

Healthy? The figures showed the influence of some Grandchild Moses. Crude crayoned shapes. Puzzled bluish (studies?) grass.

"But healthy, Nor, how do you mean healthy?"

"Well, like in the ghetto, the children always seem to draw figures who are dwarfed by their surroundings. This, apparently, indicates they feel oppressed."

"Oppressed or depressed?"

"Well--" yawn--"oppressed, of course. If you stop and think--" which she did, delicately suppressing still another...yawn..."the idea that our environment is so much bigger than us indicates that we are in a jungle..."

"A jungle, eh!" he forced a chuckle, ha, ha, "Mr. Bwana time to me---" --and even though Nora grimaced he laughed loud and touched her hand. It was better than watching her yawn. There had been a time, and don't forget it, when, if he showed any interest, ANY, Nora, you would have spilled out half the Encyclopedia Britannica. Oh fuck me, Billy Boy. But he had to coax now. Maybe it was all the mornings, afternoons, the evenings: he'd look up blankly: but what'd you say Nora, I wasn't listening...

But what'd you say, Nora, I wasn't--she had changed the subject. She might, she was repeating, need the car when it got fixed. Possibly the whole rest of the week. That just-touched hand seemed a million miles away.

"But what about work?" Nora crossed her arms. "What if I have to work overtime?"

"You always work overtime. That's what--that's what --that damn promotion of yours means, Overtime!"

"But--but--"

"Well, doesn't it. Be honest. And I wish you could explain to me just once why. You don't make enough at that job to warrant it."

Emphatically he raised his hand.

"But do you Bill, really?" She seemed to be staring at something beyond him, a stove? a life? "I think lately that job is all you care about. We never go anywhere. You have no interests, as far as I can see, except the job. Oh sure, cards, but what's happening to us. Its not like it was."

She looked so worn out. He would have smacked her, he decided, except she looked so worn out. Her nubbin nose, the furrowed forehead. So give in, big guy, take the car, hon.

And then--BILL MILLER IS A CHRISTIAN FOOL--she: "You know, for a guy who spends as much time as you at making money, you'd think we'd have a car that wouldn't break down all the time..."

WHOA!! And who always wants to save save save!!!!??

"I get raises, Nora, PLENTY FUCKING RAISES!" he shouted, swore.

He had pushed his palms against the table. Her eyes (breathe hard) suddenly glittered like the razor's edge. She began this treadmill of complaints...you ought to do this... if you would just do that...and all it amounted to was: little nubbin nose, eh, you fat fucker, you don't make shit.

But did he complain? NO COMMENT PLEASE. His headache had returned in a rush, a ka-boom of yellow screaming. For relief of said--he spat into his cup--try murdering your--or Rexall's new giant size arsenic--BITCH NORA--safety cap for the kiddies--I hate Navajo Indians--but--

Nora had tucked a piece of toast in her mouth. STRANGLE. Words were tumbling out. If you don't...fixed... half chewed eggverbs quivering kelp-like in this shallow pool of coffee. Once--he spat again--he had this nightmare: fastidious Nora, unfastidious mad: speakchewing big brown clumps of steak he would have to take the train today which became suddnely buzzing bees--

"Bill, you aren't even listening to me?"

"Of course, I'm listening--" African killer--"Nora, but don't you know, you shouldn't talk and--" could feel the regret already--"eat at the same time. At least in the morning." ha the jcke's on

--clack of teeth. "What--shit!--" He hadn't married those eyes. You never clack swear, Nora

"Hey, listen, Nor, if you really need the car, I shouldn't have any overtime this week."

Sing it, Stepin Fetchit

"I don't know if I even care..." she was glaring at a painting, parallel red lines, Mr. Mondo Cubisto. Usually, that was his job..."You seem to think seeing me is so disgusting. I just don't know, Bill--" faster--"I get up to fix breakfast and--" faster faster

Special bulletin: mushroom clouds taking shape across the table. He began to say: c'mon honey, begging, even beseeching Mr. Mondo Cubisto, take it easy.

Marcia was in the room. Nicole. The sweet little Princess. Disgust. Don't torment me in front of her, Nora. Up. His whole body rose like a giant frothing white cap. Up. "Listen, I'm leaving--" "Doc, my chest--" this is really silly to argue. I'll walk to the train. I can get coffee at the Golden Cup."

HE WOULDN'T FIGHT.

Here, this moment, surrender: it infuriated her. The nature of women is slash across their Rubicons, spirit clamoring: lash me, spite you, fume me: Schopenhauer.

"You're really perverse this morning," Nora...PLEASE!

"Perverse. Where did you dig that word up, Nora?"

Oh, shit. That's what I mean--we're both in a bad mood. We're both being petty."

"BOTH! Petty! You say you say--" And for a fleeting instant, she pulled at her carefully wrought bun and he thought it all would collapse.

Then Nicole ran over. "Daddy, are you leaving?" Nicole black hair flapped loose like some flag of bad luck.

He was, Princess. Sigh, sorry. (While Nora snapped, Nicole, get your slippers, and his ally had to flee on pattering feet) and he had to flee too, Princess, but think of it as a tactical retreat--preserve your strength--because tonight, Darling, tonight would be unmitigated y'know warfare. Nora held grudges like nobody else. I want to come home to, NORA, my slippers, JUST ONE TIME, NORA, the paper by the easy chair. He gulped the cold rest of his coffee. The room shiver/shimmered like a maiden ravaged. Oh, Nora, Nora, all YOU want, Nora, is Camelot(Princess back, beslippered), the Renaissance, a husband who spouts French (I love you, Princess) when he fucks.

(but does she, Bill? do I?)

With moist palms, forlornly slack, he escorted Cotton and Princess to the door.

Kennedy is a great man, and Bill, stubbing styrofoam, would return, now on a roller coaster, free, with satin sheets for seats and Nora naked and the wind whistling Dixie.

Goodbye kids

Goodbye Daddy

He was, in that moment, goodbye, a brief kiss for Marcia, unwitting, golden, brief for the somehow queenly darker somber favorite, briefest of all and tentative in the general direction of

Pink toenails

Blonde streaked hair

Its a beer gut Nora

I'm sorry

On the way to the train, for the briefest, for the most furious, the most imperative instant, he was paralyzed: HAVE I MISSED THE TRAIN?

Have I? His hands were in his pocket. His heart in his throat. He started to jog jog. The muggy air seemed like a weight on his back. He hadn't gone a block when he realized his beer gut was more than a beer gut and the train --well, the train was very gone.

ON the day after his wedding, Bill Miller awoke in the honeymoon suite of the Motor Hilton in Detroit, Michigan, aware of two things also:

A) His hangover.

B) The utter finality of his fate. He would never fuck a broad he wasn't married to or who wasn't a whore. Nora had been the Great White Hope. Flop! The knowledge of this failure prowled through his heart like some Richard Speck gone truly beserk. Flop! Fail! I had to get married just to get laid. The positively no-charge hotel/motel bedside radio was turned on soft and these painful words began ringing in his ear, they became a song, louder, sassier each time, until finally, I had to get married, he was positive, just to get laid, it was the Supremes on the radio. Shabang. I had to get married just to get laid. Motown honey. And groin a groan, he ordered almost everything on the breakfast menu and tried to forget.

NORA, do you ever dream about me?"--to himself.

MOBY GRAPE

"An Essay in the removal of the
Cork Sealer of Distilled Spirits"

Call me Wino. Some years ago, never mind how long precisely, I took my first carafe of wine. When I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet, it is then that I draw solace and inspiration from the noble grape.

In this essay, I will attempt to lay in its component parts, that not unvetted process of cork removal, which is requisite to consumption of the fruity nectar.

By following carefully, and with no little concentration to this explanation, I believe the novice oenologist may procure, at no risk to himself, the rejuvenating beverage.

Indeed, whether you wish to partake of the excellent red wines, be they Burgundy, Beaujolais, Champagne, or the Bordeaux, to name a few, or your preference is towards their neighbors, the proud German whites; although these wines be as unlike each other as day to night, all are as good as the other, and you will find all sealed with cork. May I add at this time that the aspiring wine enthusiast should steer clear of those wines distilled in that western-most extremity of the continental United States, California. For it is said that, as if by some magical transformation, those wines have taken on the color and viscosity of blood, so hard do the laborers of those vineyards toil, and for such little recompense.

Without further dalliance, if you, the reader, have decided you are of a mind to embark upon this undertaking, then, "allons-nous," let us proceed. Assuming that you have already procured your desired wine from amidst the veritable cornucopia of alcoholic beverages that any liquor store is, (the choosing of a wine is such a monstrous and labyrinthine

its myriad complications are so convoluted, that I must needs leave those considerations for another essay) you must transport yourself to the store's checkout counter. It is on this table, or counter, made of formica, that you will with the grace of divine providence, spy a basket, or bin, of no more than one foot's height, and approximately that width, filled to its brim with corkscrews. Purchase, along with your wine, one of these clever little instruments, and proceed from that place with all haste which prudence permits, to the spot you have selected for consumption, letting no petty distraction impede your journey.

The corkscrew, named for its sole function, is a tool fitted for its labor with no little ingenuity. It is made of wood and steel, and forms the letter "T", its steel section protruding perpendicularly from the middle of the wooden "grip." The "grip" or "handgrip," of cleverly shaped wood, is designed to fit comfortably in a clenched fist, with the steel "lance" protruding from between the holders second and third fingers. The lance is a spiraled strip of steel, three inches long, tapering at neither extremity, its coil a uniform tenth of an inch in diameter. The lance ends in a finely honed point, not pointing at a right angle from the handgrip, but in a direction continuous to the flow of the coils. It is this pointed coil which facilitates the screwing of the cork, in the same manner one would screw a woodscrew into wood.

Sit comfortably in a chair of your choice; you are ready for cork extraction. Grip the slender neck of the bottle with one hand, letting the fat "belly" of the bottle rest firmly between your legs. You will observe a foil wrapper which covers the mouth and the upper inch of the bottle's neck. Peel this away, and lo and behold, the cork is laid bare, nestled snugly into the bottle's oriface, forming an impass through which the precious contents cannot escape should the bottle be laid on its side or held upside down.

The cork is a clever fellow, not being cylindrical as the careless observer might believe, but conical, both its extremities truncated, with very little difference between the circumference of its greater and lesser ends. The cork is placed in the bottle smaller end first, and then pounded down until it reaches a secure footing.

To the greenhorn, only that disk which forms the top plane is at first apparent. Firmly grasp the bottle. This is essential to the success of this adventure, for when the cork is finally removed, the bottle, as if by its own volition, will attempt to fly out of your grasp. Many a parched throat has been robbed of salvation when the bottle splintered itself into a million tiny shards on some cold and uncaring stone floor.

The bottle in firm captivity, grip the corkscrew in the prescribed manner. Taking good care to insure that the corkscrew will enter into the cork so that the handgrip is parallel to the plane of the cork's top, which is to say, in

a manner which aims the lance towards the very deepest bowels of the bottle, jab the point into the virgin flesh of the cork. This done, screw. Screw with your very heart and soul, but be sure to screw in that direction which draws the corkscrew into the cork. Feel not remorse for that hapless cork, for it has served its purpose well, and the time has come, as it must for all things, to meet its Maker.

When at last the handgrip lays flush against the mouth of the bottle, then the most crucial part of the operation is at hand. Clutch the bottle with hand and legs, and wiggle the handgrip back and forth, to and fro. The cork will begin, almost imperceptibly at first, to loosen its hold. Now jerk the grip hard, directly away from the bottle, and wrench the cork from its berth!

Immediately, the room is filled with an aromatic bouquet, which makes the very heart take wing when inhaled! You are now ready to imbibe. Fill your glass, lift it high, toast you love, and drink.

HOW TO ACQUIRE AND USE A DIAPHRAGM

You've decided to do it. You've been on the Pill for too long and just gotten sick of ingesting hormones everyday. Or, you have an I.U.D. and couldn't take the pain and bleeding every month. It may just be the thought of not having any side effects is really appealing. Maybe those cancer stories you've heard have really started to scare you. Or, you've just split up with your old man and you're not going to sleep with anyone ever again, but you'd like to have something just in case you meet the true love of your life next Saturday night. So you've read a few magazine articles and decided on the same old-fashioned method that your mother used, the diaphragm.

You may have even seen hers once, when you were snooping around in her lingerie drawer, looking for something fancy to play dress-up in. You knew you had come across one of the great mysterious secrets of grown-ups, but you'd better not ask any questions. You'd only get yelled at for snooping and you already figured it had something to do with that dirty, sex stuff anyway. Now you're beginning to think that maybe your mother and her generation has the right idea. Maybe they weren't backwards and mysterious.

You've phoned the doctor and made an appointment for your fitting. The idea of a fitting conjures up visions of tiny, small-boned ladies with French accents, scurrying around with pins projecting from their teeth. It's not like that at all. In fact, if your doctor shows up with scissors and pins, get out of there fast.

Like any doctor's office, you will have to sit out in the waiting room. Bring a good book because if your appointment is at 1:30, you probably won't be called until 2:30. If you don't bring your own reading material, you'll be stuck with magazines like Parent's Life, that are at least a year old. It is perfectly safe to read any of the birth control information

that is lying around. There are no scare stories about diaphragms. No one ever died from using one.

If your gynecologist is also an obstetrician, you will be sharing the office with women in various stages of pregnancy. Some may have with them the products of their nine months of labor. Remember these ladies and their screaming brats. File this scene away for further reference. At those weak moments when you figure it can't hurt to leave it out just once, think of those pregnant women draped all over the waiting room with their big bellies. Think of nine months of looking like that. Think of that kid who comes up to you with a toy gun and goes BANG-BANG right in your face, nearly sending you through the ceiling. Listen for that darling babe-in-arms who didn't once stop screaming. Think of spending eighteen years of your life with one of those brats. You'll put in your diaphragm. Just one moment of weakness is all it takes. More on that later.

Inside the office, it is not unlike any other visit to the gynecologist. You'll have to strip from the waist down and put on one of those ridiculous gowns that are always about twenty sizes too large. The arm holes hang down to your waist and you can wrap it around you at least twice. Then you sit around the examination room in that thing, waiting for the doctor, who is probably on one of his many coffee breaks. If you watch soap operas, you know that doctors spend half their time in the coffee shop.

Meanwhile, his cute, sexy little nurse will barge in on you. She'll usually say something like, "How are we today," and then stick a thermometer in your mouth before you have a chance to say "WE are fine and don't need this damned thing in OUR mouth." She'll leave the room for what seems like eternity, and the moment you take the thermometer out of your mouth, she'll pop back in to scold you and put it back in, even though your temperature has already registered at 98.6. She may even threaten to put it in the other end if you don't behave. Then she'll wrap an oblong plastic thing around your arm with a funny rubber bulb attached to it. She'll squeeze the bulb until it feels like your arm is going to come off. Then she'll slowly release it while she clocks your blood pressure. Don't talk to her while she's doing this or she'll lose count and have to do it over again. Her final task is to weigh you. If you're lucky, there will be a scale in the room. Most likely, you will have to follow her out to the hall in that horrid gown. Then you'll stand on the scale feeling very conspicuous and very naked under that thing, while she keeps pushing the lever up adding more pounds. Even if you're in perfect shape, she'll make you feel fat. You begin to think that one of the prerequisites for nursing school is a history of sadism.

Finally, you're back in your own little examination room and the doctor pops in. He'll look like he's in a tremendous hurry. Don't let that scare you. You are paying dearly for his time, so get all that you can. When you tell him that you want a diaphragm, he'll probably try to talk you

into the Pill. Maybe he thinks that you, like all women, are not bright enough to take the responsibility for your own body. He may even get kick-backs from the drug companies that make the Pill. Or he's just been brain-washed to believe that the Pill is really the only method to use. No matter what, stand your ground. Remember that all doctors belong to the AMA. And everyone knows what crooks they are, the AMA that is.

The examination is quite simple. You will get up on the table and put your feet into the stirrups. It's uncomfortable, but it's supposed to be. Nursie will place a sheet over you for privacy. That doesn't make any sense, because the doctor will see the same thing with or without the sheet, but it's all part of the game. He'll then tell you to move yourself down to the edge of the table. That means move your ass down until your knees are practically at your ears. Then he'll tell you to relax. There is no way you will be able to relax in that position, so don't even try. Brace yourself for an onslaught of cold metal. Doctor will go to the refrigerator and take out the coldest speculum that he can find. For the uninitiated, a speculum looks sort of like a duck bill on a handle that opens and closes; Donald Duck without a head. The speculum is doc's main instrument of torture. He'll hold it closed and stick it up in your vagina. Then he'll open it as wide as he can and poke it around until he centers your cervix, and has a look around. Meanwhile, you're lying there with visions of frostbite in your cunt, gritting your teeth, and wishing that God had never invented gynecologists. When he takes that horrid thing out, he'll stick his finger in, covered with rubber gloves of course, and poke around for a while. This may feel pretty good. In fact it may feel terrific, especially if you have one of those cute young doctors. Don't let him know you're enjoying it. Remember he has to maintain professional ethics, so act bored.

When he finishes with the finger exercises, he will have figured out your size. Actually, he makes an intelligent guess. He'll take out a diaphragm and put on a bit of lubricating jelly. Then he'll squeeze it so that it takes the shape of a tampon. He'll then insert it and stick his finger in to check and make sure that he has calculated correctly. If he had, he'll take it out and have you put it in. If not he'll try another size until he gets the right one. You shouldn't feel it when it's in place.

He'll instruct you on how to insert it. Listen closely because he won't want to explain it more than once. And you don't want him to think that you're stupid. He'll hand you a small round rubber object with a flexible coil rim that looks sort of like one of those metal, half-cup measuring cups, only it's a cream-colored rubber. You squeeze two sides together, lean forward, and insert it just like he did. It's much like putting in a Tampax and will seem very simple. Then he'll have you stick your finger in and feel a hard, round bump protruding into your vagina that should be covered by rubber, if

you did it right.

That is your cervix. It is of utmost importance that the diaphragm covers that. If not all those millions of little sperm will be able to swim up and fertilize your egg. He will stress that you check it every time you insert it.

Using a diaphragm is a good way to get to know your own body. If you are squeamish about touching yourself, now is the time to get over the fear. You may see if there are any self-help groups in your area where you can meet with other women to learn more about your body. The doctor does not hold a patent on that information. There are also a number of books out that you can find in the feminist section of your local bookstore. I highly recommend OUR BODIES, OURSELVES, which contains good, basic information for all women.

Now the examination is over and you can get out of that creepy old gown and back into the comfort of your own clothes. Nursie will come in smiling and hand you a box containing your brand new diaphragm, and all the things you will need with it. She'll tell you to use lots of spermicidal jelly and to add more each time you have intercourse. She'll also tell you to leave it in eight hours after you have relations. Then you are free to go home and practice.

Don't feel smug, and think because you did it right the first time that you don't need to practice. You have yet to do it with the jelly. That's where the fun comes in. When you sit down on the toilet in the bathroom, you'll think you've forgotten everything the doctor told you. Don't worry, there are instructions in the box. The diaphragm will be in a small, light blue, pearlized plastic case. They always try to make these things look feminine and subtle, but everyone knows that's a diaphragm case. Also in the box will be a small tube of jelly, and a plunger for inserting more jelly when you need it.

Put some jelly inside the diaphragm. Then put some around the flexible rim. The jelly stinks and it tastes just as bad. It's all very chemicalish, but you and your partner will find that out eventually. Next, open the lips of your vagina and slide your butt forward on the toilet for easy access. Then comes the hard part. Fold the diaphragm. Don't be surprised if it slips out of your fingers and flies across the room, splashing that stinky jelly all over everything. This is a common occurrence. Pick it up, clean it off with plain lukewarm water, and dry it with a towel. Add some more jelly and start all over again. Keep doing this until you get to the point where you are no longer sending missiles around your bathroom. Then clean up your bathroom.

You now have two hours to use your diaphragm before you will have to insert more jelly. It's nice if you happen to have a partner around to try out your new toy. It will definitely make all that trouble worth your while. If you have to add more jelly, just use the plunger. You just fill it up with jelly and insert the gunk just like you would a Tampax.

To remove the diaphragm, wait at least eight hours to make sure the jelly has killed off all the sperm. Since the diaphragm works rather like a suction cup, all you have to do is insert one finger under the rim to break the suction and then just pull it out. To clean it and store it back in the case, simply wash it with plain lukewarm water. Do not use soap, as it can rot the rubber. Then dry it with a cloth or paper towel 'til it's completely dry. Dust it with corn starch, yes, corn starch does have other uses besides making gravy, and then put it back in the case.

Now for the sermon. Unlike the pill and the I.U.D., the diaphragm requires something called responsibility. That means use it. There will be moments of passion where the last thing you want to do is get up and put that damned thing in. Do it no matter what. Otherwise you may be wondering why your period is a few weeks late and why you're feeling sick in the mornings. That moment of passion will seem very foolish when you're sitting in the doctor's office waiting to find out if the rabbit died. Used properly, the diaphragm is about 98% effective. Properly means with the jelly and everytime you have intercourse. You've heard of the diaphragm babies of your mother's generation. That's the standing joke for the children conceived when they thought just once wouldn't hurt. So use your diaphragm and enjoy!

OLD FART AT PLAY

Mr. Casey had already limped around the block twice. His right crutch made a clicking sound on the sidewalk. The rubber tip on its bottom had worn away. He could get around pretty good despite the stump leg, big belly and fifty-five years. He was always out and about when the weather was nice.

It was almost dark. The streets were alive with people walking, children running and playing, bicycles racing in the wind, radios blasting mournful guitar music, and rattle-trap cars crashing over chuck-holes in the pavement. Mr. Casey had his eye on one old tenement in particular, a three-story, yellow bricker in the center of the block. He kept the front door in sight. He wasn't going to miss that girl.

She was a plump, juicy looking chick with a white bandana wrapped around her head. It was the rotund behind that really had him going. He could still see it shaking like jelly inside the tight, red pants. He had made up his mind. He was going to come right on out and offer her the twenty-dollars. He wanted it that bad. He didn't know the woman. He had just seen her on the street and followed her to the building.

Mr. Casey stopped a few yards from the doorway and looked up at the windows. There were lights ablaze on each floor. He wondered what apartment his quarry was in? What was she doing? Why didn't she come on out?

He was about to sit down on an embankment next to the building when someone stepped snappily out the door. It was her. He stepped up his pace behind the woman. Shortly, he came lurching up beside her.

"Hi," he said, in his flat country voice.

The woman did a double take on him, smiled coldly, and kept stepping.

"What's your name, baby?"

"Sally."

He liked her name. He liked everything about her. He hadn't noticed it before, but her face was pretty. The skin was vibrant and brown, her eyes wide open and alert. "Hey, I want to go," he told her. "I got twenty bucks."

They came to the corner. It was a busy, commercial street they were about to cross. The air was heavy with the aroma of cooking pork. The stores were lit up, but they were all closed except for the bars and restaurants.

"How you know I'm selling anything, honey?" she retorted, giving him a thorough going over with her eyes.

"I don't know, but I do know I want to buy some. I want to buy some of you."

"Well, you sure don't mind saying what you mean."

"No, I sure don't."

Sally turned to look squarely at the old man. She could see the twenty dollar bill folded up in his shirt pocket. "Come on," she said. "I'll turn a trick."

They crossed the street, then continued on. It got darker as they walked further. "We can go to my place," Casey offered. "I got whiskey there, and beer too."

"Naw, I know somewhere, hon," she purred.

They came to the next corner, turned and made their way up a deserted side street. She stopped in front of a crumbling old rooming house, and pointed toward a doorway on the side.

"Come on, baby," Mr. Casey hesitated. "Come on," she repeated, rubbing her crotch and wiggling her thighs. "I want to see what you got to work with."

This excited Casey. He limped off behind her, looking back over his shoulder to see if anyone was watching him. Sally held the door open as he stepped down one step into the moldy gloom of the basement. He was about to turn around when he felt his crutch leave his grip. She pushed him. He toppled over on his side.

"You old motherfucker," the woman said, "gimme that money." She reached for his shirt-pocket.

Casey grabbed at her hand, but she was in his stash. "Hey, gimme that!" he yelled.

"Shut up, Nigger," she snarled, and she gave him a sharp crack on the side of his head.

He instinctively raised his hands to protect his face, and felt the paper dollars fly out of his pocket. Old man Casey looked up at Sally. She stuffed the money down into her bosom. "Come on, baby," he pleaded. "You got your money. At least let me see that hairy hole."

"Goodbye, you nasty old man," she told him. Then she hurled his crutches away into the gloom, opened the door, and was gone.

Richard Chwedyk

ON WHAT HAPPENED, OF WHAT HAPPENED
(the dream letter)

Dear Susan Basko,

Whenever, I close up books, walls in restaurants tip inwardly until dishes and centerpieces slide off their tables, dropping to the floor; blue colored night skies drip off of canvases and stain the rug.

There are pitchers of milk spinning like gyroscopes on the cutting board. This is what happens when the book makes that clipping sound only thick books sitting in the palm of one hand can make.

This will remind you of Fort Knox safes suspended from wires over something that will remind you of the Detroit River, though it cannot be the Detroit River. If it were, you would be reading another book.

Think of that baking pan, the one you hold in your hands when you sit and talk to me. It is filled with yellow oil, and the oil rocks in the pan as you move your arm up and down; a lecture on tides, although that was not written down. The conversation in the living room involved the names of sailors who had disappeared; every ship that sailed in the fog and did not come back. The missing sentence in the log book snapped shut and sent pitchers twirling. That was the reason for the time spent in the living room, away from your child; the house that rocks when waves drop heavy and thick behind the house.

The people you sent to find me all made mistakes; stop in doorways or on street corners to be watched from windows like the friends of Saint Andrew. The books they close are in Latin, and I cannot close books when people are sent after me. It would be easier to find you if you walked after dark, did not run up carpeted steps in your bare feet, or draw the smoke from my room by a circling gesture made with a

chewed pencil. That pencil, which was dropped into the center-crease of a yellow book . . . could it be eight years ago? There are libraries of papers that document the dropping of that pencil, but your sources of information are even greater than this. Sources of information that take me to South Boulevard at night; I was mistaken for a ghost by those who saw me; and it was the three penny nails gripped tightly in my right hand that gave me the aura of someone more accustomed to wearing cloaks. It was only a sailor's raincoat. Your window was the lighthouse and I followed it, but could go no further than the park. The book closed again, and this time it closed with my hand inside it, though it still made that snapped-book sound. That is why it can never be the Detroit River.

That's why,
Fortier

THE ELEVATOR

The next day Barbara awoke alone in her bedroom with chills that ran up and down her spine. It was dusk outside and the light from the sky cast strange, oblique shadows in her room. The door was left ajar as if someone had checked on her every now and then. The blankets and bed spread did not help, for she shivered uncontrollably.

She smelt cabbage boiling on the stove which only made her stomach growl. How long had it been since she had eaten? She smelt beef juices sizzling in the hot skillet, then listened to the sounds. Gravy bubbling with onions. The rattle of plates and the tinkling sound of silverware. The refrigerator door opening and closing two and three times. Someone getting up out of the plastic covered chair, walking over to turn the television on and its male voice blasting, then gradually being turned down to a gentle whisper. The scuff, flop-flop, drag of her mother's house shoes to the hall closet. The opening of the front door and the off key falsetto voice of her brother humming "Satin Doll."

"Shhhuuusshhh...", her mother said. "Barb is sleeping."

"Oh yeah! I forgot," Bobo said.

She heard Bobo lift the tops off the pots and drop them either because they were too hot and he had burned his fingers, for he let out a muffled "Damn," or because Martha had caught him and hollered, "Don't be pickin' in the food, Bobo. You ain't the only one dat's gon eat ya'know." Then Ruby's scuff flop-flop house shoes scurrying to the kitchen to say, "Will you two stop making so much noise! The girl's in there tryin' ta get some rest, 'n I don't want..."

"Well what we s'pose ta do den? Whisper all damn day long?" Bobo said.

"That happens ta be your sister in..." Ruby said.

"Wow! FOR REAL!" he answered, "I thought it was a QUEEN or somethin', the way YOU carryin' on."

The house was silent except for the voice on the television, and a chair being pulled out from under the table, and the plop down in it, the plastic puckering up, and, from the weight, the smooth hiss of air being released.

"...don't do this. Don't do that... It's huh own silly ass fault she..." Bobo said.

"I knew it was gon happen sooner or later. Want some beets Bobo?" Martha said.

She heard liquid being poured into glasses that made her throat dry.

"...the way she always runs down ta Sara's..." Martha continued.

"I'm hip!" Bobo threw in.

"I bet I can count the times on one hand, mind ya, dat that skinny lil wanch been up heh! said Martha cold as ice.

"Cause huh Mama don't 'low huh out afta daw, dat's why!" Bobo said.

"But Miss Dummy in there with huh stupid self cain't bring huhself home afta daw, she gotta go 'n get huh..." Martha said.

"N where was Miss Sara's..." Bobo asked with food in his mouth.

"Safe 'n sound in huh mam's house! Where ELSE?" answered Martha.

"HELL YEAH!" And then she heard a glass slam on the table and liquid running off the table onto the floor in uneven beats.

"Now look what you done..." Ruby said. "...here, wipe it up befo' it sticks. I don't..." And Barbara knew that Ruby was going into her old routine and talk about how she didn't want the house to get dirty "NOR" messy because she had just cleaned it, and "...with that girl in there..." and all, company was going to be dropping by. An that it would be better to have the house clean and all, cause you never know who might decide "ta pay a visit and you know how folks talk, especially folks from on da job."

She wanted to get up and march in the kitchen and curse them out, but she couldn't simply because she felt as if she had been sentenced to stay in that bed, in that room, in that house, in that community for the rest of her life. For the first time since the rape, she wished the man had killed her. Gradually her hunger left her, and she dozed off to sleep.

She was alone in the cab, two days later, and cursed her mother bitterly for not returning with her from the check-up the nurse insisted she have while still at the hospital, that cold and foggy night. Ruby had been with her each day until now. She took three days off from work which made Barbara feel proud because Ruby didn't take off for anything.

Once when Bobo got his knee cut while fighting, she left work, came home, bandaged it up, then went back to work. And on Martha's graduation Ruby met her at the school's auditorium, and returned to work when it was over.

She felt both proud and alone, and wished Ruby had stayed with her and not put so much trust in the cab driver to bring her home. What she needed was an adult to walk her to the elevator, pass the boys that were standing in the entrance pitching pennies. She thought above asking the cab driver, but changed her mind. As a rule, driver's didn't come to the projects. "They are too damn bad," was the familiar response.

But why were they there? No one ever comes on this side of the building, the Root Street side, or the "front" as it was commonly called. Not even mothers who had enough gall to bring their babies out for fresh air, would bring the infants on this side. The front was peaceful and quiet with only the low hum of cars from the expressway on the other side of the railroad tracks which ran directly in front of the building. Everyone preferred the State Street side, where the playgrounds, and all the noise in the world, seemed to be to Barbara.

From the front, the huge red structure looked like those expensive high rises Barbara had seen on North Lake Shore Drive. There was no paper thrown around on the grounds. And the grass that was neatly trimmed and watered during the warmer months, seemed to have been put off limits by the tenants. No one played or walked on it. A string of chains lined the sidewalks from the end of the block to a walkway leading to a canopy that covered the entrance to the building where the boys were standing. If only there was an elevator outside her window, her own private, glass elevator that would glide her up the side of the red, bricked building. She would slide past the seventh floor, not giving a damn about what goes on up there, and stop at the eleventh. And when the elevator would halt at her bedroom window, only there would she step out to her black tiled floor, and land on the soft bed covered with pink linen.

She saw June standing close to the boys and they didn't pay her any attention; just spoke. Barbara figured they would say more than that. June was skinny; they always said something to skinny girls. They hadn't seen June for a long time, since she'd been in the hospital six or more months. That would surely warrant more than a "Hey June, what's happenan?" Maybe they were feeling sorry for her because she had lost a baby.

Then the cab driver slammed on the brakes and she jerked in the seat, as the car made a loud, squeaky noise. She looked at the cab driver, and then for June, but she had disappeared. Then she saw the boys, only for a moment, stop their game. They looked up; it didn't hit anybody, so they

went back to pitching pennies. She was relieved. The one thing she didn't need was attention; she didn't want to get out of the cab anyway.

The driver asked for his fare, four dollars and twenty cents. She searched through her purse, pushing her wallet and brush to one side, and noticed the purse had a small hole in one corner. He had nice eyes, but he wouldn't help her and she was going to return the favor. She gave him five singles and waited for her change. No, she wouldn't give him a tip, what had he done for her?

She got out of the cab and walked up the pathway to the building. The boys stopped pitching pennies and moved into small huddles, grouped in three's and four's. Someone to her left was whispering loudly, purposely, to another that she was the one that, ---- got raped the other night, man!" real proud, like her was the rapist.

Butch was the loudest. Whatever he did the others followed. "Hey, Miss Brooks, would ya mind if I escort ya ta the ELEVATOR?"

"Naw man, let me take her ta my house and we can get..."

"Uh, Miss Brooks, would ya mind reliev'in' me of my..."

Then Derrick stepped in front of her, blocking her path. Because he had liked her she knew he would be her hero and take her away from this hell. He was tall and slender, and when he wore his hair parted down the middle he looked his best. And, whenever he spoke, his voice was smooth and gentle. He put his hands on her shoulders. "Barbara baby, would ya mind, if I took a shower - IN YOU."

They all broke out in a laugh. He reached for the hem of her coat, "Damn, Ah missed. Watch man, Ah'ma get a piece of dat."

She covered her face with the one hand that was free, and ran into the breezeway past the only pay laundry room in the building, past the first floor's incinerator that smelt of smoke, past what looked like a million mailboxes, and tripped over a beer can rushing to press the elevator button.

"Why in the hell don't they leave me alone?"

When the elevator came she hesitated to get on. It was the same elevator where she had been raped. She stood there remembering how he stuck his thing in her and the awful pain that followed, her panties hanging around one knee, getting muddy from the wet and dirty floor. How the cold door against her buttocks had warmed up as he moved up and down, pressing her body against the door. How he bit her breast with his brown teeth. How his slobber ran down her face when he tried to kiss her. His hands touching her waist, her thighs. His hands squeezing her buttocks. She laying in the corner smelling pee, smelling sweat, smelling his semen.

She let the doors close without getting on.

RAIN WASHED STONE

Of all the times I've been to the mall in downtown Washington, D.C., the thing that stands out most clearly in my mind is the smell of rain washed stone. The museums, galleries, and monuments are all laid out on a mall that stretches from the Lincoln Memorial, past the Washington Monument, and down the rows of the Smithsonian buildings. A promenade in the middle separates the museums, and leads to the Capitol Building. A person could spend a week there and not see everything.

Normally these avenues are thronged on weekends and they aren't really that much better during the week. There's always a line four or five people deep that stretches a number of times around the Washington Monument, and you seldom, if ever, have a chance to take a picture of something or someone without tourists walking through.

That's why the rain brings out such a startling change. As the sky overhead darkens and the air humidifies to the soaking point, there is a subtle, but noticeable thinning of the crowds on the mall. Standing at the foot of the monument, the overall view is that of people making their way to the fringes of the grounds with only a few brave souls still strolling in the center. With the advent of the down-pour there are very few people out in the open. It's almost as if the whole thing has been rehearsed many times before.

Viewed from the shelter of the awning at the closed concession stand at the monument's edge, the rain comes down so hard that it almost obscures the view of the tall structure. The park police, in their wide-brimmed hats, quickly pull everything they want dry into the monument, and it takes on a deserted appearance.

Standing there, with the rain pounding on the roof and

and ground, there's a unique feeling of aloneness even though thirty or forty other people have also taken refuge under that awning with you. The steady drone of the drops becomes the only thing you're aware of, and when the pour begins to end, however slowly, it always seems too abrupt. The lessened intensity of the rain reveals the monument is, miraculously, only wet on three of its four sides. Strange that anything that big and that open could stay dry in a wetting like this.

It's then that the odor of rain washed stone becomes tangible. It's a smell that comes from everywhere around you, and suddenly makes you aware of just how much marble and concrete there actually is in this area. The monuments, statues, sidewalks, streets, buildings, stairways, and even the concession stands are made of stone. Each kind of stone exudes its own fragrance into the freshly washed air and becomes almost overpowering. Everything you thought you might have smelled before, is submerged in this rain washed concrete fragrance that, in itself, is one of the singular experiences that the mall in Washington, D.C. has to offer.

MAGNIFICENT COOK

There stands on a small, crooked street, midway between the old and new of France's most famous city, an inn. Older than the cobbles of the pavement, it is unpretentious, dingy, and extraordinarily famous. If a man seeking a common meal were to venture inside, he would be amazed at the prices written in chalk on the large counter opposite the door.

Only three items are served, each requiring a full day's work, or its equivalent, for their purchase. The first is a bouillabaisse of such delicate composition as to defy the most careful analysis. Moist, succulent chunks of fish without the faintest taste of wordly pollution are mixed intriguingly among vegetables of unearthly perfection. Peas, round and large as grapes, translucent emerald green, are scattered in the sauce, whose particular aroma has caused the most jaded of men to quiver in anticipation. The second is a filet, but of no ordinary meat. Each piece, marbled in Vatican perfection, is tender without being soft, and smothered in hollandaise. One wonders what mortal animal could nurture such flesh without bruise or bitterness. The last is a crepe, in name only, as close to the normal batter as a church spire to a peasant's hut. It is filled with a mixture that hints at strawberries glazed in royal jelly, possessing a creamy texture that coats the mouth and throat with pure joy.

Each plate is prepared from beginning to end by one Joachim Latour, the world's most accursed poisoner. His story is one of misery and revenge.

Sixty years old at the time of our telling, he had suffered in a degree usually reserved for whole nations. At age fourteen, on the very day the government had announced the vanquishing of the continent's last great epidemic, Joachim's entire family perished. Left alone, he was forced to seek

work in the midst of economic panic. First as a scrub boy in a local cafe, then as a cook in a nearby crossroads restaurant, he worked eighteen - sometimes twenty - hours a day, for wages that only enabled him to go more into debt. The long years of standing on rough floors thickened his legs and ankles until he was forced to scuttle about his kitchen crouched on a stool with wheels, so painful had standing become.

Slowly he sought to accumulate enough to become his own master. Marrying in his thirtieth year, his wife, initially tender and pleasant, soon turned barren and sour. Too lazy to tend house, she demanded his attentions day and night, providing constant torture instead of solace on his few free hours. For a man that had a gift in his hands, a way with food that was supernatural, he was a failure at everything away from his stove and fire.

As his culinary prowess grew, his misfortunes multiplied. First a thieving waiter stole his life's savings, then a tainted water supply ruined his reputation, which was followed by a cough persisting no matter how bright the sun. One day a careless helper, no one knows exactly how, started a fire that burned both the restaurant and Latour's neighboring house to the ground.

At this point, it might seem as if his fortune had turned, for both his prison and his wife were consumed in the blaze. Joachim found himself free. Able to make his way to Paris on a meager insurance settlement, he purchased a small inn in a city that would fully appreciate and reward his genius.

It was too late. Years of misfortune had warped his soul. Despite growing acclaim, there burned within him a desire to spread his misery. In a stroke of vengeful genius, he saw a way to turn his talent into an instrument of revenge.

Wandering at night and early morning through the metropolis, he gathered all that was putrified and spoiled - fly ridden dog waste, rat hair, hospital leavings, and other atrocities too vile to list. He brewed a preparation that was disease and death distilled. One spoon, not nearly full, was enough, after terrible suffering, to kill the strongest alley dog.

In order to be able to spread the poison as far and wide as possible, Joachim worked even harder at the suffice of the inn. Skillfully preparing each dish with sacramental care, he would cunningly mix in a minute dose of death. He reasoned that if he poisoned his patrons by degrees, no one would be the wiser. Those same people who most profited by his skill would die by it - slowly, painfully - as certainly as if he had used a garrote.

Never looking his customers in the face, he portioned out his magnificent creations to men, women and children alike from behind the huge counter; taking the money in through a

small swinging door that allowed him to remain hidden. He did not desire to know who he was killing individually, rather, his hate was on such a grand scale that he preferred to think of himself devastating whole communities.

He might have gone on forever, taking in money without meaning, and doling out sublime, gastronomical death, but for the providential slip of a small paring knife. Slicing too fine, at the end of a long day, he nicked the tip of his index finger right above the nail. The cut bled very little, and it soon seemed to heal. It had - except for an infinitesimal opening which was continually spread apart by the flexing of his fingers to fold his magnificent crepes.

The next day in his haste to blend his putrified mix with a large batch of sauce, his finger accidentally slipped down the wooden spoon and dipped into the container of poison. Within a fortnight, he was dead. Doctors, summoned to his bedside, remarked at the multiplicity of diseases from which he had perished. Never had they seen one man die of so much at once.

As he died heirless, the state bailiffs were called to dispose of Latour's property. It was then that they discovered his horrible secret hidden behind the huge counter for all those years. Aghast, they made haste to contact all of his surviving patrons, to determine the extent of his crime.

What then emerged was the fitting end to Joachim Latour's miserable life. For it appears that even in plotting death his gift could not be denied. Instead of finding hundreds of people slain by mysterious maladies, after dining at the inn, the authorities found the ranks of his regulars exceedingly healthy and disease free - abnormally so.

The experts argued and experimented - documented and studied. All sadly lacked Latour's brilliance. They ultimately surmised that small doses of his poison had acted much as the serum does to combat the plague, nurturing and building body resistance to the point where Latour's victims were virtually immune to death except by accident or old age. Try as they might, the best doctors of the country were unable to duplicate his recipe. Joachim Latour's secret died with him.

If the magnificent cook's story has a clear meaning, it is twofold. First, one cannot deny a talent. The greater the gift, the greater its incorruptibility. Second, Latour was a true failure throughout his miserable life, and it is only right that he truly failed miserably at its end.

JABBO AND THE HAIRY DEMON

Jabbo's daddy was a heathen and a no-good thief. He stole corn and watermelons in the dark of the moon, grew marijuana in his backyard, robbed a dead man, killed pregnant roach, and worse than that, belched in the preacher's face at church. So everybody thought that when Jabbo's daddy died he'd never get to heaven because the Hairy Demon would surely grab him first. That must have been the way it happened, because they never found him after he fell off the ferry boat in the Mississippi River where the current flows quicker than anywhere else. They looked for him a long way down river and in the still pools between the sandbanks, but they never found Jabbo's daddy. And they heard a big man laughing across the river, and everybody said, "That's the Hairy Demon and he's the devil's right-hand man." So they stopped looking for Jabbo's daddy.

"Jabbo," his mama told him, "the Hairy demon has got yo' pappy and he's going to get you if you don't watch out."

"Yas'm," he said, "I'll look out. I'll take my hound dogs everywhere I go. The Hairy Demon can't stand no hound dog." Jabbo know this because his mama told him. And his mama knew about things like witches, ogres, trolls, man-eating monsters, and hairy demons.

One day Jabbo took his axe and went down in the swamp to cut some poles for a hen-roost, and his hounds went with him. But they took out after a rabbit and ran it so far off, Jabbo couldn't even hear them yelp.

"Well," he said, "I hope the Hairy Demon ain't nowhere round here now." He picked up his axe to start cutting poles, but he looked up and there came the Hairy Demon through the trees grinning. He was sure ugly and his grin didn't help much. He was hairy all over. His red eyes burned like fire, and spit drooled all over his big yellow teeth.

"Don't look at me like that," said Jabbo, but the Hairy Demon kept coming towards him and grinning, so Jabbo threw down his axe and climbed up a big, 40-foot bay tree. He saw the Hairy Demon didn't have feet like a man but like a duck, and Jabbo had never seen a duck climb up a bay tree.

"What are you doing up there?" the Hairy Demon asked Jabbo when he got to the bottom of the tree.

Jabbo climbed nearly to the top of the tree and looked down. After taking one look at them big yellow teeth, he climbed straight to the top.

"Boy, how come you climbing that there tree so fast?" the Hairy Demon asked.

"My mama told me to stay away from you. What you got in that big potato sack?"

"I ain't got nothing yet."

"Go on, get away from here," said Jabbo, hoping the slim tree would grow some more.

"Shut-up boy! I'm taking your ass to hell with your no-good father. The boss-man done gave me my orders!" The Hairy Demon swung Jabbo's sharp axe and wooden chips splattered everywhere. It went this way all afternoon, Jabbo hollering and the Hairy Demon chopping. He hollered till he was hoarse and the Hairy Demon was gaining on him.

"I'll come down half-way," he said, "if you'll make this bay tree a little bit taller."

"I ain't doing nothing, so you might as well come on down," said the Hairy Demon, swinging the axe.

"I bet you can't make this tree taller," said Jabbo.

"You must be crazy, come on down boy, I've got something to show you," said the Hairy Demon.

Then they went at it again, Jabbo hollering and the Hairy Demon chopping. Jabbo had just about yelled himself out when he heard his hound dogs yelping in the distance.

"Hyeaaaah, dogs, hyeaaah," he hollered. "Come save me from this evil old demon."

"Shut-up goddamnit! Your dogs ain't coming, I sent that rabbit here to draw 'em off."

"Hyeaaaah, dog," hollered Jabbo, and they both heard the hound dogs coming closer and closer. The Hairy Demon looked worried.

"Come on down, boy" he said, "and I'll teach you some magic tricks."

"Bullshit, I can learn all the magic tricks I want from my mama."

The Hairy Demon cussed and slobbered some more, but he threw the axe down and ran into the swamp.

When Jabbo got home he told his mother that the Hairy Demon had almost got him, but his dogs ran him off.

"Did he have his potato sack?"

"Yes'm."

"Next time he come after you, don't you climb no bay tree."

"Why, mama?"

"Look boy, don't you climb no kind of tree. Just stay on the ground and say, 'Hello, Mr. Hairy Demon,' You hear me, son?"

"No'm, I don't understand."

"He can't hurt you. There is a way to get rid of him."

"How?"

"You just do like I tell you. First you walk up to him and say 'Hello, Mr. Hairy Demon; I heard you're the best magician around here.' He'll probably say, 'I reckon I am.' Then you'll say, 'I bet you can't turn yourself into an elephant.' But remember, you keep telling him he can't and he'll finally do it. Then you say, 'I bet you can't turn yourself into a giraffe.' And he'll do it. After he does that you say, 'Anybody can turn themselves into something bigger than a man, but I bet you can't turn yourself into a frog.' When he does it, you grab him and throw him in the sack."

"It doesn't sound right," said Jabbo, "but I'll try it." So he tied up his dogs so they wouldn't scare away the Hairy Demon, and went down to the swamp again. He hadn't been there long when he looked up and there came the Hairy Demon grinning through the trees, hairy all over and his sharp teeth showing more than ever. He knew Jabbo came without his hound dogs. Jabbo nearly climbed a tree when he saw the potato sack, but he didn't.

"Hello, Mr. Hairy Demon," he said.

"Hello, Jabbo," He took the sack off his shoulder and opened it up.

"Mr. Hairy Demon, I heard you are the best magician around here."

"Damn right, I am."

"I bet you can't turn yourself into an elephant."

"That's no problem," said the Hairy Demon.

"I bet you can't do it."

So the Hairy Demon twisted around and turned himself into an elephant.

"I bet you can't turn yourself into a giraffe."

The elephant spun around and turned into a giraffe, all the time watching Jabbo to see he didn't try to run.

"Anybody can become something bigger than a man," said Jabbo, "but I bet you can't turn yourself into a frog."

The giraffe twisted around and turned into a frog and Jabbo grabbed it and threw it in the sack. Jabbo tied the sack up as tight as he could and then he threw it in the river. He went home through the swamp and when he looked up, there came the Hairy Demon grinning through the trees. Frightened, Jabbo climbed straight up the old bay tree.

"I bet you're wondering how I got out of that sack. Well, I just turned myself into the wind and blew out. Now listen up Jabbo, I'm going to sit right here till you get hungry and fall out of that bay tree. I got you cornered, so you might as well give up."

Jabbo thought awhile. He looked at the Hairy Demon and the hound dogs tied up almost a mile away. "Well," he said, "you've outsmarted me. But I bet you can't make things disappear."

"Hell, that's what I'm good at. Look at that there bird-nest on the limb. Now look, it's gone!"

"How do I know it was there in the first place? I bet you can't make something I know is there disappear."

"Ha ha," laughed the Hairy Demon. "Look at your shirt."

Jabbo looked down and his shirt was gone, but he didn't care because that was just what he wanted the Hairy Demon to do. "That was just a plain old shirt," he said. "But I bet you can't make the rope around my breeches disappear."

"Boy, I can make all the rope in this country disappear."

"I dare you!"

The Hairy Demon became angry and stuck his prickly chest way out. He opened his mouth wide and hollered aloud, "From now on all the rope in this country has disappeared."

Jabbo reared back holding his breeches with one hand and a tree limb with the other. "Hyeaah, dog," he hollered loud enough to be heard more than a mile away. The loose dogs chased the Hairy Demon through the swamps, taking vicious bites at his hairy skin. When Jabbo and his dogs got back home, his mother asked him if he put the Hairy Demon in the potato sack.

"Yes'm, but he turned himself into the wind and blew right through the sack."

"That's bad," said his mother. "You've fooled him twice; if you fool him again he'll leave you alone. But he'll be mighty hard to fool the third time."

"I'll think of something," she said, and then she sat down by the fire and held her chin between her hands and thought real hard.

But Jabbo wasn't thinking about anything except how to keep the demon away from the house. He took his dogs and tied one at the back door and one at the front door. Then he crossed a baseball bat and an axe handle over the window and put some more wood in the fireplace.

After a little while his mother said, "Jabbo, go down to the chicken coup and get that little baby chick away from that old hen."

Jabbo went down and snatched the baby chick out of the coup and left the old hen squawking and fussing angrily. He took the baby chick to his mother and she put it in his bed.

"No, Jabbo," she said, "you go up and hide in the loft."

So he did. Before long he heard the wind whistling and the trees shaking, and then his dogs started growling. He looked out through a knothole in the planks and saw the dog at the front door looking toward the swamps, with his fur standing up and his lips drawn back in a snarl. The dog jumped and jerked but he couldn't get loose. Then suddenly, with one

frenzied motion, he tore loose from the rope and ran into the swamps. Jabbo looked out another hole at the back of the loft just in time to see his other dog jerk loose and take out after some imaginary animal which the Hairy Demon had conjured up. "Aw, shit," said Jabbo. "The Hairy Demon is here for sure!"

Suddenly, he heard something with feet like a duck scrambling around on the roof. He knew it was the Hairy Demon, because he heard him damn and swear when he touched the hot chimney. The Hairy Demon jumped off the roof when he found out there was a fire in the fireplace and came up and knocked on the front door, as big as you please.

"Ma'am," he hollered, "I done come after your baby boy."

"You ain't gonna get him," Jabbo's mother hollered back.

"Give him here or I'll set your house on fire with lightning."

"I got plenty of water to put it out with."

"Give him here or I'll kill your crops, eat your animals, and take away your year's supply of ExLax."

"Hairy Demon, you wouldn't do all that. That's mighty mean."

"Sweetheart, I'm a mighty mean man, I ain't never seen a man as mean as me."

"If I give you my baby, will you get away from here?"

"I give you my word," said the Hairy Demon, so she let him in.

"He's over there in the bed," Jabbo's mother said.

The Hairy Demon came in the room grinning from ear to ear. He walked over to the bed and snatched the covers back. "Hey," he hollered, "there ain't nothing in this bed but a little baby chick!"

"That's right, I didn't say what kind of baby I was giving you. You asked for a baby and that's what you got, a baby chick!"

The Hairy Demon cursed and yelled. He stomped all over the house gritting his teeth. Then he grabbed the baby chick and tore out through the swamp, knocking down trees left and right. When the Hairy Demon left, Jabbo came down from the loft.

"Is he gone, Mama?"

"Yes, son, he's gone. He's been fooled three times."

And to this day, the Hairy Demon has never ever bothered anyone again.

Tom Nawrocki

UNDERGROUND

Jan. 1968

Dear Buck,

Yesterday I decided that I had to get out of Texas. I'm not going to say why - I'm not sure myself. I just had to go. I left the parking meter next to the Alamo in San Antonio about noon, and just started driving. The only stops were for gas. I didn't even eat; just tanked up, and jumped back in the van.

Late in the night, I was rolling along half in a daze, mesmerized by the centerline flashing along, when thump - the road seemed to get smooth, easy and wide. A sign flashed by saying "Welcome to New Mexico, Land of Enchantment."

There was no traffic so I stopped to take a piss. I left the engine running but turned out the lights, and climbed outside. The stars were dazzling and seemed closer to the earth. The Milky Way was not only visible, it was milky. Over the drone of the motor I could hear that sign back there. It had an aluminum belch as the wind occasionally forced it back and then let it pop forward.

When I got back in the van, I had a feeling of renewal for some reason, but I didn't understand it. As I thought about it, I remembered that I had spent most of my time in Texas in cities. It seemed ironic; all that land, and me running from Dallas to Houston to San Antonio. Right there I said to myself, "No more cities."

So what did I do? I drove straight into Carlsbad. Carlsbad isn't like a city though; it's more like a resort town. There's one main street, the highway, which has an abundance of motels, restaurants, and bars. I decided that I would get a room so that I could take a shower (to wash Texas off, I guess).

The next morning I had breakfast and started driving over to the Carlsbad Caverns. Rather than falling away gradually, the town just stops with the neon sign of the Sundowner Motel. (A large neon sunset, naturally.)

The land here is absolutely stark and barren. As I headed south, to my left was a vast plain of greyish rocks that extended to the horizon. The only growth seemed to be this dull, brown sort of bush. This Ocotillo cactus has alot of thorny, brittle branches that frantically snake and twist in every direction away from its underground roots. The branches usually go about six or seven feet, with the younger plants being smaller but just as panic-stricken. Funny, but I half expected the younger plants to grow straight up, or have some protective covering, but they didn't. To the right were the Guadalupe Mountains. Their resemblance to mountains is in name only. They look like 1500 feet of sandy ground and boulders shoved together in a long pile, the way a kid at the beach would do it.

The entrance to the cavern is on top of these hills behind a ranch-style, modern building with a lot of windows. As I turned off the van and locked up, I noticed that the sun felt particularly warm coming through the windshield so I sat and basked with my eyes closed, like a lizard on a rock. The wind swished around the van and nudged it with gusts that moaned.

Eventually, I went into this side room which turned out to be a museum of sorts. The lights were dim and there were only a few people standing here and there, reading explanations of the encased exhibits along the walls. One older man with an L.B.J. style cowboy hat leaned forward from the waist, intently studying something. His western, string tie hung straight down away from his body, motionless.

It seems that this whole area of New Mexico, Arizona, and part of Texas was under a large sea two hundred-million years ago. I glanced back outside past the flourescent lighting of the waiting room where people were milling around, and visualized that barren plain of rocks outside as a sea floor. There were a few scattered mounds in the distance, but mostly it did look like a dry sea floor in the sunlight, all the way to the horizon. Try to imagine Lake Michigan drained, and you'll get the picture.

Then I calculated the figure for my life if I lived to the unlikely age of one hundred. I arrived at the fraction one-two millionth. Can you picture how small this is, or imagine setting the points on your car to that tiny gap? I felt like an insect, and even that seemed to be assuming a pompous attitude in view of these numbers.

Reading on, I discovered that these mountains, the Guadalupe, were once alive. Sponges formed the skeleton, which later supported corral. Originally these hills were a long reef of thirty miles, similar in structure to the

Great Barrier Reef off the Australian coast. Gradually these reefs calcified into the limestone of their present state. Water then eroded away the inside of the structure carving out the original form of the caverns. Several thousand years ago most of the water dried up. I'm sure that there was more to it than that brief description I had read, but I was already overwhelmed at having traversed a hundred-million years in a few paragraphs.

People were beginning to move towards the doors at the back of the building, so I left the room. But I felt as if something had clicked in my mind to open up my perception to more than my own meager space in time.

As the doors were opened, I noticed people cranning their heads to one side of another, trying to see through the spaces in front of them. I suppose that I, like they, expected a beautiful revelation right at the door's edge, but that wasn't the case. As I walked outside, all I could see were the rounded shoulders of the rocks on top of this mountain beneath an azure sky, and part of the asphalt path that wove through the chalky limestone. A sign read, "Three and one-half miles of arduous walk; wear appropriate footwear. Constant cavern temperature 56 degrees; dress accordingly."

Walking along, I examined the rock formations while zipping up my parka. Everybody's hair was being whipped about by the strong winds.

At first I was surprised by the smooth contours of the distant rock, although nearby it was made up of jagged stone. It seemed like this large seashell, this gigantic Chambered Nautilus would have a smooth texture. Then it dawned on me that even the smooth shells which are found washed ashore throughout the world, seemingly smooth to the beachcomber's hand, are rough and mountainous to the microscopic algae that inhabit them.

Turning a corner, a depression containing a concrete tiered amphitheater capable of seating several hundred people appeared. As I continued the downward turn an expanding arch of blackness revealed itself, as if a hooded figure were slowly drawing away his arm to unveil the shadows within his cloak - the mouth of the cave.

A sign soon answered my unspoken question about the amphitheater. During the summer, migratory bats live in the first large chamber of the cavern. Each evening the bats leave the cave in mass. There are so many that they shroud the sky, obscuring the sunset like an expanding pillar of black smoke. In August and September, when the young are strong enough to fly with the old, their combined exit takes as long as two hours to complete. At dawn or just before, they straggle back in various sized groups after their night of foraging.

Speculation has it, that the bats led Indians to the

cavern about a thousand years ago. Judging from pottery fragments, fire rings and wall drawings, they used this upper cave for religious ceremonies. Later the Apaches used this chamber to hide from the cavalry.

The first white person to enter the highest portion of the cavern is thought to be Rolth Sublett in 1883. Rolth was twelve when his father lowered him on a rope into the cave. No doubt, the old man had visions of the boy returning with a handful of gold nuggets, but that didn't occur. The only thing in the cave was hundreds of thousands of pounds of bat guano.

For a moment I allowed myself to fantasize on the boy. What went through his head as he sat in a rope loop, descending with uneven jerks and lurches into this black hole? The lantern he carried must have illuminated shadowy monsters swirling about him as he twined slowly around on the end of the rope, listening to the slow drips of water and occasional calls from his father ricocheting around him.

I descended the asphalt path through the amphitheater into the yawning mouth of the cave. My shadow lengthened in front of me as I walked, and then began to diminish in sharpness as the outside light weakened. I experienced an odd sensation of falling as the darkness grew heavier.

The path was steeper here and my downward steps surprised me, creating the uncomfortable feeling that you get when you think you've reached the last stair in a series, and then you lurch forward in the darkness as you discover one more. For a moment I felt unconfident and my steps became shallow. But eventually I grew accustomed and fell into a pattern of walking, or controlled falling, that would continue for the next three miles.

Understand that the path continually angles down by at least fifteen degrees. Because of this, your heel makes contact first before the rest of your foot slaps down. The trick is to let this happen with a natural flow, keeping your knees flexed and your body weight back. Your arm motion will feel exaggerated like British marching, but that's alright. If you resist this, you'll tire too quickly and not be able to enjoy the trip. In other words, you have to choose between appearance and practicality - I'll take the latter every time.

By this time my eyes had adjusted to the dim light, making it easy to follow the stalks of handrails which now had shaded lights, like a movie theater's aisles. This made the walk more secure, but also removed some of the adventure.

What a trip it must have been for Jim White, first man to go deeper than the Bat Cave, to inch his way along these ledges. Carrying only a kerosene lantern, he wouldn't have been able to tell where the rock path was leading him, or where it might crumble beneath his weight. I imagine there were times when he would test the path with his toe, inch by inch, while holding the lantern at arms length, his heart

pounding rapidly.

I passed through a series of tunnel-like enclosures and came upon another room. As the trail wound around and switched back and forth, I was able to approach the stalagmite columns for a closer look. Although these structures, formed by the calcium carbonate deposited by droplets of water, were rock hard, they appeared soft, like layers of frozen custard. It seemed incredible that rock could be this gentle. There were also formations here that resembled draperies. The soft, shawl-like folds were caused by water trickling down in sheets with no one defined course. At the floor of this room stalagmites rose fifteen feet above me. These projections also had that same layered softness that I had never seen in the upper world.

By the time I made it to the next leveling off spot, Devil's Den, my knees had a slight tremor in them. Once again, I imagined Jim White here holding the lantern high, and staring in wonder at some stalagmite whose shadows would subtly drift back and forth with the lamp flame. His sense of awe must have been enhanced by the slow drips of water, one for every two breaths, that would plunk into some pool and resound throughout the room. I was overpowered; he must have been spellbound since he was alone, in the dark, and the first man ever there.

I continued down the slope as it became steeper. Now I had to use my leg muscles in restraint to keep from running. Then, almost shockingly, the path leveled off. My legs were trembling, and it felt unusual to walk on a flat surface. I had reached the bottom.

The first room was the Green Lake Chamber which was long and narrow with a low ceiling. There was a large pond whose water was emerald green, although clear enough to see the bottom. The water was perfectly still and mirrored the ceiling. It seemed strange to see a body of water with absolutely no life in it. The King's Room was similar in shape but had many slender stalagmites surrounding a sheet formation. All the chambers and trails were truly amazing, and just when I felt that I could no longer be astonished, I came to the Hall of the Giants. The stalagmites here rose 50 and 60 feet into the air. Still soft and gently layered, these dynamic columns towered above everything. Several rose to the sheet formations on the ceiling, where the nub of their highest part disappeared. The largest formation was titled "Giant Dome" and rose to a height of 62 feet. Its circumference had to be at least 20 feet.

It is impossible to imagine these things forming drop by drop, growing one-half inch every one hundred years. These were the visual displays of the mind numbing figures I had calculated upstairs. It suddenly occurred to me that if these formations were alive, they wouldn't complete one breath in my lifetime. Even if I stayed down here for years,

they would never even see me. I would be like a proton, a portion of an atom, swirling around invisible to these creatures. To say the least, that idea sucks the wind out of your ego's sails. However, I revelled at the thought. I suddenly felt expanded and timeless. No matter what I did in my life, from here on, it wouldn't be important compared to these landmarks. And yet, I somehow felt that I was a part of all this; perhaps just be being here. It was a weird combination of mental sensations. After a while a young ranger with blonde hair told me that they would be closing soon.

"What's it like in the dark down here?" I asked.

"Stick around," he said, nodding a smile.

Later he unlocked a small box and turned out a section of lights rendering the back portion of the room dark. The giant shadows cast by the formations made the room look entirely different. The blackness of the closed portion seemed forboding and mysterious. It occurred to me that one could spend years down here, yet a simple shift in the light source would make it all different and new.

As we walked to the elevators, more lights were put out, and, looking over my shoulder, the darkness seemed to be pursuing us. While waiting for the elevator, I asked the ranger how long he had been working here. He said that he was from Arizona State doing research in the closed portion of the caverns.

"Closed portion?" I queried.

"Oh ya. You only saw three miles. There's 20 more back there that tourists aren't allowed in."

I didn't know what to say to that. The elevator arrived and, as we waited for the time-delayed doors to close, he said, "Most of the rangers have been working here for the better part of their lives. Some of their fathers worked here before them."

The doors closed and the elevator jolted. The ascent was almost too fast; the elevator vibrated and I put my hands on the rails as I leaned back in the corner. I had the feeling of being expelled or catapulted. Before I knew it, I was standing in the parking lot next to the van holding my keys, motionless. It wasn't that anything was wrong, I just felt dazed. A cold wind buffeted me and that snapped me to awareness. I stretched my arms and loosened my legs. The sun was already below the ridge-line. To the east, mountain shadows were crawling out on the desert floor. As I fumbled to unlock the van and climb in, I had an odd sensation that I was doing things for the first time.

Even now, Buck. I don't understand it. Something happened to my sense of time, sense of life perhaps. One thing for sure; if you ever drive within two hundred miles of this place, go out of your way to get here.

Jerry

"I DON'T CARE IF I EVER GET BACK"

This day at Comisky Park is not an ordinary one. Besides being a warm, sunny Father's Day, June 4th, it is Bat Day, and 51,904 fans have turned out to see the doubleheader between the New York Yankees and the Chicago White Sox. My father, bald but missing that middle-aged paunch that haunts many men his age, sits to my left. My brother, an exuberant youth of twelve, sits to my right, clutching one of the 20,000 bats that the management has given away today. I, sitting in the middle, am the shaggy-haired, college student, who only sees the family on ritual occasions. Together, we make up the male side of our family, joined for this Sunday service - the doubleheader baseball game, which is the only form of religion acceptable to all three of us.

Our box seats for these games are directly behind the Sox dugout. The groundskeepers are dragging the infield in preparations for game two. The Sox won the first game easily, 6-2, and the crowd is jovial while anticipating the start of the next game. The field in front of us is sun-bathed, but the stadium that surrounds us is shaded.

My father reaches between his legs, fumbling for his beer cup. "These seats aren't too bad." He takes a gulp of beer.

"Hey, nothing is too good for the old man on Father's Day." I laugh and give him an elbow in the ribs.

"Ah, get off it," he mutters as he shakes his head. He is smiling.

Actually, the seats are great, and he knows it, but would never admit it. For years he has said that the true fan sits in the grandstands. If he knew that I paid nearly double the normal price to get these box seats, he wouldn't have come. He's like that. He loves baseball, but he always

sits in the lower grandstand to save money. Today, I told him that somebody gave me the tickets, so he accepted the luxury.

The public address system cracks on, and an echoing voice pronounces, "Today's crowd is the sixth largest in White Sox history, and also the largest since the night game with the Yankees on July 7th, 1954."

When the cheers subside, my father, with quizically knitted eyebrows says, "We were at that game."

"No. I don't believe it. How can you remember?"

The old man is looking off to the sky now. "I remember. The Sox had a 1-0 lead going into the top of the ninth when Mantle gets a walk and Berra hits one outta here. The Sox lose 2-1." He begins to shake his head as if reliving the moment. Then, under his breath he mutters, "Damn these Yankees."

I am astonished. "How can you remember that; it's been eighteen years."

He looks at me, now chuckling. "That's easy. It was your mother's birthday. I argued for hours to get her to come. Finally, you and me came alone."

The memory comes into focus; it was my mother's birthday. My brother hadn't been born yet. I turn to the old man, "Is that the game where you grabbed my hot dog and threw it at Minnie Minoso?"

"Naw, I never did that." With pursed lips he is slowly shaking his head.

"You did! I remember. Minoso did something and you yelled, 'You bum,' grabbed my hot dog, jumped up and threw it at him." Funny, but I can still remember looking at my hot dog on the edge of the outfield grass for the rest of that game. I had only taken one bite.

The old man is lost in thought, sipping his beer. "Maybe I did." He seems to be talking to himself. "Minoso misplayed a ball that dropped for a hit. Virgil Trucks was pitching and he only gave up that one hit, goin' into the ninth." He turns towards me now and shrugs, "Maybe I did do that, but I don't remember. I remember those Yankees, though."

The old man still says Yankees the same way as he used to. His mouth snarls on the first syllable before he spits out the last. To hear him, one would think that he was talking about some Union soldiers who had burned his plantation in the Civil War. But no, he's talking about the New York Yankees, who in the 50's, continually finished in first place ahead of the White Sox. Even though the Yankees are not the same team today, he still hates them. He will always hate them. To him they are the aristocracy, the three-pieced vested suits, while he is the worker, the wearer of white sox. Above all else, he hates the Yankees.

I remember the time when I was a kid and we still lived on the second floor at 32nd and Union. I came home with a cracked bat. For more than an hour I sat on the back porch

carefully turning wood screws into both sides of the cracked handle to make it solid again. You have to go far enough down the handle, away from the fat end, to make sure that the screw contacts both sides of the crack with a firm grip. If you don't go far enough, the bat will crack again as soon as you hit a ball. But if you go too far with the screws, the cracked part of the bat will splinter, and then it's no good. After I got three wood screws into it, I wound several layers of black, electrical tape up and down the handle all the way to the label, so you couldn't even see the crack.

When I went inside, the old man was sitting at the kitchen table with the opened newspaper hiding his upper torso. His work boots sat on the floor beside him, and his feet were up on another chair under the table. Supper was cooking on the stove so the room felt humid, but I could still smell that sort of bitter-sweet odor of his sweat socks.

"Hi, dad."

He peeks around the edge of the paper without putting it down, just moving it a little, like it was a curtain and he is checking to see who rang the doorbell. "Hi, what'ya got there?"

"Just a cracked bat I found. I fixed it up."

By now he has swung around and laid the paper down. "Lemme see." I hand him the bat and he closely inspects my repair job. "Not bad," he mutters. Then he grips the bat handle with both hands and wags it back and forth. "Little too heavy for ya, ain't it?" He glances at me with a squint.

I shrug.

"Ya, I remember when I was your..." he turns the bat to the fat end and reads the autograph. "Mickey Mantle," he growls in a low, sort of disgusted voice, then takes a deep breath through flared nostrils with his jaw set. "Mickey Mantle!" He says it louder as he glares at me. His forehead is furrowed. He looks at the bat again, grows red, and shouts, "Mickey Mantle's bat," now raising it above his head with the fat end in his hand. With a quick slicing motion, he smashes the handle down on the floor.

As he raised it, I thought he was going to hit me, so I jumped back and threw up my arms. The handle portion cracked, bounced off the floor, ricocheted high on the wall knocking the picture of Jesus pointing to his Sacred Heart off balance, before the handle hit the floor again, and vibrated to a halt.

By now the old man has dropped the other end and is pulling on his boots. My mother comes running up to the kitchen, her eyes wide and one hand on her chest as she stands just short of the door. "Vito, what's wrong?"

"Mickey Mantle's bat in my goddamn house, that's what's wrong."

The walk to the sports store on 31st and Halsted was more of a run. I had to keep jogging to catch up with

the old man. He kept talking about Yankees and White Sox, but I had no idea what he was saying.

Inside the store, he took me by the hand straight over to the round carousel from which bats hung down. He stooped over and began checking autographs on the large ends of the bats. A salesman came over and said, "May I help you?"

Without looking at him the old man said, "I'll let you know when we're ready." After a couple of minutes he said, "Here's one," and he pulled it out. "See if it's light enough for ya."

I tested the bat, but there wasn't room enough to swing. Actually it didn't matter. I had already made up my mind to take whichever one the old man would hand me. I had never seen him like this before. The old man was wiping the sweat from his forehead now with the sleeve of his shirt and pushing his thinning hair back over the bald spot on top. "This one's great, dad."

"Okay then, let's go," He looked around for a second. "Might as well get you a new ball."

As we walked over to the cash register, I tried to read the signature on the bat, but couldn't "Who is this guy, dad?"

"Ferris Fain? You don't know who Ferris Fain is?"

"I just couldn't read..."

"Ferris Fain was the greatest Sox hitter," he fumbled for his wallet in his back pocket, "since - I don't know - Joe Jackson, I guess."

The name doesn't mean anything to me. I sounds more like a ride at Riverview than a ball player.

By this time the line-ups are being posted on the large scoreboard above centerfield. I notice it first. "Dick Allen isn't playing." I'm surprized because Allen has played every inning since the beginning of the season.

"He probably took the rest of the day off to get smashed. He got two hits in the first game, and stole home." The old man tosses down the last of his beer.

"They're resting him, I'll bet," I mutter unconvincingly. I've read that Allen does whatever he wants.

He's gonna hit a home run," my brother says while tapping the end of his bat on the concrete.

"Listen, Andy, he's not in the game." The old man seems irritated, as he sits half-turned in his seat looking around. "If you see a beer man, flag him down."

"He's gonna pinch hit and get a homer. You'll see." Andy had his chin on the bat now, and is pushing the other end with his feet.

The old man and I look at each other and half smile, as if to say, "Ah, the blind enthusiasm of youth."

The second game begins with Mike Kekich of N.Y. throwing against Jim Lemmon, a rookie. There is an air of

euphoria about the park. Many of the fans have left after seeing that Dick Allen wasn't playing. Of the 25,000 that remain, it's obvious that they're staying for a good time. Kids are running through the aisles freely, as adults drink beer and converse, paying minimal attention to the game. Shadows have spread over the infield and the lights above the stadium are on, although it is still daylight.

By the second inning the old man no longer has to flag a beer man down; one appears regularly to check if he's ready. Most of the people around us have gone home, so the old man can spread out with his arm draped over the chair next to him, and his feet on the back of the chair in front. He appears to be in his element.

Andy has gone to wander about the park. He checks back every half inning for more money and to find out if Allen is playing.

"He's gone home, I tell ya," the old man says as he gives Andy a dollar. The boy doesn't say anything as he turns and runs back up the stairs.

The game is only mildly interesting at first. The Sox immediately fall behind 4-0, and chip away for a run in the fifth and one more in the sixth. This seems to suit the old man. "I knew they couldn't take two games from the Yankees," he grumbles. "Ya wanna go?" He kills a beer and picks up the one he has been holding in reserve.

"Naw, let's stick around." The old man shrugs. I have this feeling that the Sox will pull this game out. They have only lost three home games all season and something is in the air.

In the eighth, Pat Kelly singles to start a rally. That's when it begins. Like a sleepy beast awakening that stretches first one section of its body and then another, the crowd begins to cheer in different parts of the stadium. A chant of "go-go-go," unifies the fans, and the cheering grows in volume. Then the kids begin slamming their bats on the wooden chairs in time to the chanting. With each pitch the sound becomes more distinct and louder. Between pitches the chanting rhythm stops and is replaced by a buzz of conversation, as everyone seems to congratulate each other on the uproar. In all my years as a Sox fan, I have never heard anything like this. The old man doesn't chant or clap his hands, but he is leaning forward in his seat and looking around at everybody between pitches. He glances at me with a bewildered look, as if to say, "I don't believe it. Don't they know that the Sox don't have a chance. Don't they know they're up against the Yankees?"

But the rally fizzles without the Sox scoring, and the score remains 4-2. The old man sits back, folds his arms across his chest, and says, "I knew they wouldn't score." Meanwhile, Andy has returned and is softly bouncing his bat on the concrete. The old man leans past me. "Relax Andy. If

Allen was here, they would'a used him that inning." Andy merely shrugs. Nobody mentions leaving now. We all want to stay to see if Allen will bat. It doesn't matter if he strikes out; we have to know if he is physically present when the Sox lose a game.

The Yankees go down in order. The Sox come to bat in the bottom of the ninth with Rick Reichardt leading off. As he steps up to the plate, the chant and pounding begins, but not nearly as long as the previous inning. Reichardt, obviously swinging for the long ball, flies out deep to left. One out. Carlos May is next, and, after fouling off four pitches, he works the count to three and two. The chant has become a roar now, and bats are hammering seats. The Yankee pitcher, Kekich, steps off the rubber and goes to the rosin bag. Everybody boos. As he comes back to the mound, roughing up the ball between both hands, the uproar resumes. May takes ball four and the Sox have a man on first with Bill Melton coming to bat. Melton takes a ball and then a strike, before slapping a rolling single through the hole between short and third.

Everybody, including the old man, leaps to their feet and cheers. The Sox have two men on and one out in the bottom of the ninth. As the old man sits down, he grunts a cynical laugh, and mutters, "Yep, time for a doubleplay," while folding his arms across his chest. Andy is standing up and trying to peer into the dugout.

On the field, play has stopped. The Yankee pitcher is standing behind the mound and staring into his dugout. The next scheduled Sox hitter is Jose Morales, a utility infielder whose weight (160) usually exceeds his batting average. He is standing in the deck circle, but instead of loosening up, he, also, is staring into his dugout. Obviously, the managers are playing strategy games. The crowd jeers at first, but then the staccato pounding begins and gains momentum as more of the crowd picks it up.

Morales starts to walk back to the dugout but then stops, cups his ear with one hand, shrugs and then heads slowly back to home plate. Individuals in the crowd begin to shout, "No, no. Get Allen in there." The old man is smugly grinning his cynical I-told-you-so leer, with his arms still folded in front of himself.

Kekich strides up to the top of the mound, roughing up another ball while his glove is tucked under his arm. Then it happens. Just before Morales reaches the batter's box, there is a whistle from the dugout. Morales turns around and starts walking back without changing the position of the bat on his shoulder. He must have known that he wasn't going to hit. The top of Dick Allen's batting helmet appears from the dugout and the crowd breaks into thunderous cheering. He is not more than ten feet from the dugout, striding directly towards home plate when the organ bellows out the first bars of "Jesus Christ Superstar" through the

P.A. system. This tune is played everytime Allen comes to bat and it seems appropriate rather than blasphemous. He is the answer to years of prayer by White Sox fans who have patiently waited for an all-star ballplayer who can hit home runs. If they were allowed on the field now, these fans would probably lay bats at Allen's feet on his way to home plate.

And he is on his way to home plate. Usually, he saunders over to the on-deck circle, pulling on his batting gloves with his 42 ounce, Louisville Slugger tucked neatly under one arm in the same way workers carry their newspapers. Today, he goes straight to the batter's box holding the bat in both hands and flicking it downward with short, choppy, wrist movements, as if it were an ax and he was marking his spot on the tree.

Ralph Houk, the Yankee manager comes out of the dug-out to bring in his ace relief pitcher, Sparky Lyle. The crowd boos out of tradition rather than displeasure, and then breaks into that conversational buzzing while Allen heads back to the dugout. Lyle is taking his time walking towards the mound from the bullpen with his jacket slung over his shoulder, spitting tobacco juice every few paces.

Meanwhile, an unexplainable change has come over the old man. When Allen first appeared, Andy slapped me on the leg and yelled past me, "I told you he was gonna play." When I looked at the old man, he was smirking and nodding his head at both Andy and me.

Andy had beaten me to the punch, so I didn't say, "I told you so," but I had thought it. I'll say this much for the old man; he accepts defeat gracefully.

When Lyle had finished his warm-up tosses, Allen came back to the batter's box amidst the same cheering and organ playing as before. He steps into the box now, and goes through his usual nervous ritual, adjusting his helmet so it is squarely in place, pushing his glasses back with a tap of his forefinger, tugging up each sleeve at the shoulder, flipping the bat with an ax handle downward snap to keep his wrists loose. While all this is going on, he moves from side to side, continually shifting his weight to stay loose.

By the time Allen coils into his hitting crouch and waits motionless for the first pitch, the rhythmic clapping, pounding and stomping has started up, and is at its highest level. Andy, among others, is not only pounding with his bat, but also lifting up the wooden chair bottom next to him, and slamming it down. The stadium is literally throbbing as these fans are demanding that Allen deliver.

The first pitch is low and away, ball one. The throbbing stops for a moment as everyone catches their breath. By the time Lyle has the ball back and peers at the catcher for the signal, the pounding is back. I notice that my body is rocking in time with it.

The next pitch is a called strike and everyone boos as the count moves to one and one. The old man leans over to me, but I can't take my eyes off the field. "Doubleplay," he mutters.

"He's going to get a hit." I really think that he is. Of course, Andy has predicted a home run, but that seems to be overly optimistic.

The third pitch is a ball which brings the count to two and one. Some moments that seem to occur is slow motion or in a realm outside of normal time, such as car accidents or earthquakes. This was one of those moments.

I have seen baseballs hit for home runs that have been driven, powered, pulverized, launched, throttled, blasted. This was the first time that I had ever seen a baseball lazed into the stand. Most home runs travel to the stands in an arc; Allen's home run is a line still rising when it hit the seats - a "frozen rope" in baseball language. There was never any question of the ball going into the left field grandstand seats when Allen hit it; the only question was how far would it penetrate the concrete. On the two ball, one strike pitch, Lyle tried to sneak an inside fastball past Allen. The crack of the bat told Lyle that Allen hadn't been fooled. Sparky never looked up; never looked to left field. He just kept shaking his head as he walked off the field looking at the ground in front of him and spitting.

As soon as Allen hit the ball, there was a split second of silence. As I begin to stand up, Andy yells, "Go!" By the time the ball begins to ricochet around the left field stands, the old man is yelling - really yelling - "He did it, he did it!" over and over with his arms outstretched. I am yelling "Alright!" and when I turn to the old man, we grab each other and hug, slapping one another on the back. Andy is jumping up and down, and he hugs both of us.

Meanwhile, Allen trots around third base grinning, actually grinning, at his teammates who have poured onto the field to congratulate him, as if they had just won the pennant. The final score was 5-4 when Allen touched home plate. The Sox had won both ends of a doubleheader against the Yankees.

I think about that moment from time to time, especially around Father's Day or Bat Day. It was the first time that my father and I had touched, aside from handshakes, since I was a child. That moment when my father, brother and I stood arm in arm, watching Dick Allen round third base with the winning run is very close to me. I wouldn't trade it for a White Sox World Series ring.

Last year in June when I asked the old man what he wanted for Father's Day, he, without a pause, replied, "Who are the Sox playin'?"